

Constructing Norwegianness in School

Exploring how school activities in nature are connected to the development of an important facet of the Norwegian identity

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Abstract

This master's thesis has a double purpose: The first one is to investigate the role and significance of nature in family and in school practices among children who attend a public, multi-ethnic school, "Solbakken School", in Oslo, Norway. The second purpose is to analyze the effects of *school-practices-in-nature* on learning and social inclusion through the development of the concept of *Norwegianess* among students. In order to operationalize concepts as broad and intangible as *nature* and *national identity*, two concepts were introduced: *school-practices-in-nature* and *Norwegianess*. A summarized version is to say that *Norwegianess* is conceptualized as cultural competence in Norwegian social practices related to nature. *School-practices-in-nature* is conceptualized as regular school-outings to local forests, beaches, lakes, etc. throughout the school-year in all kinds of weather conditions. The duration of such excursions may vary from one hour to several days. The thesis is structured as a qualitative research study based on data collected from interviews with parents and teachers. Given that one of the main research objectives has to do with familiarity with nature, ethnicity was considered a relevant variable and was taken into consideration in the choice of informants. Altogether, there were fifteen informants: seven of them were non-ethnic Norwegian parents, three were ethnic Norwegian parents and five were teachers; four of the teachers were ethnic Norwegian and one was a first generation Norwegian. All of the teachers worked at the aforementioned public school. At the time of the interviews, all of the teachers taught second grade, except for one who taught third grade. All of the parents had at least one child who attended second grade at "Solbakken School". Altogether, I have elaborated four research questions: two main empirical research questions and two sub-research questions: one empirical and one theoretical. The main-research questions are:

- 1) What are the points-of-view of parents and teachers about the role of school-practices-in-nature in school in communities with many non-ethnic-Norwegian families?
- 2) In the opinion of teachers, what are the benefits, if any, of school-practices-in-nature to children's learning?

The sub-research questions are:

- 1) How are the opinions of non-ethnic-Norwegian parents about school-practices-in nature similar or different from the opinions of ethnic-Norwegian parents?
- 2) How are school-practices-in-nature a part of Norwegianess?

The theoretical frameworks that were chosen to guide this investigation were Lave and Wenger's *Social Practice Theory* and Holland et al's *Figured Worlds*. The research findings indicated several areas of agreement between parents and teachers and pointed towards unequivocal benefits associated with school-practices in nature to all students. There were also additional research findings which, for the sake of clarity and better understanding, were grouped according to themes. There were four main themes: I) Challenges between Home and School Communication, II) Tensions between the Intention and the Reality of the Curriculum, III) Challenges between the Importance of Being in Nature versus Being in the Classroom and IV) Nature and the Importance of Doing. Additionally, the concept of Norwegianess was analyzed and an important conclusion was that it could be made accessible to all, so that each student could construct his or her own Norwegianess. Furthermore, the connection between school-practices-in-nature, Norwegianess and Education for Sustainability was discussed.

Acknowledgements

This thesis represents the conclusion of a special journey for me. It began many years ago in Los Angeles where I first became interested in the subject of culture and learning. Little did I know at that time that Norway would be the place where those original thoughts would come to fruition. But I have not journeyed alone. There are some special people who have inspired and helped me develop my ideas in more ways than I can articulate. Initially, I would like to thank Karen Fite for believing in me, and for her indelible influence in my career choice. I would also like to express my deep-felt gratitude to my advisor, Prof. Ola Erstad, who always managed to find time in his extremely busy schedule for stimulating discussions where he shared his unique perceptions and profound knowledge of educational research. His insight, patience and feedback have made my writing process much more engaging. I have a debt of gratitude to Prof. Nina Witoszek for inviting me to participate in an inspiring discussion group at SUM. In addition, I wish to thank my friend Rosane Pinheiro for her invaluable support and wisdom, and, most of all, for the encouragement she has given me during the course of this research study. There were also special colleagues with whom I have spent many nourishing hours, among them I would like to thank, Marija Paskevic, Leslie Anne McDonnell and Ingunn Ulltveit-Moe Rasting. I would also like to thank all the professors, parents and teachers who shared their time, life stories and ideas with me: their generosity is deeply appreciated. Finally, very special thanks go to my family whose love, support and understanding made this entire process possible.

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1 Introduction

To be out in nature is both a question of flora and fauna and a question of climate and seasons. Nature makes body and soul hardier and fresh air gives new strength. Nature trains independence and the ability to cope in the wild. Nature offers harmony, peace of mind and distance from the hustle and bustle of society. Being out in the so-called fresh air offers solitude and freedom from society as well as good friendship. This is how Norwegian men and women think, and to a greater or lesser degree this marks the upbringing of their children, their Sunday trips and holidays in primitive cottages (Gullestad 1992, p. 204).

Having always lived and worked in large cities like Los Angeles, Rio de Janeiro, and London, I was as estranged from nature experiences as many of my peers/countrymen until I moved to Norway eight years ago where I quickly noticed a different scenario. It surprised me to see my neighbors animatedly preparing for outings even though the sky looked threateningly ominous. I concluded that the snow and arctic climate did not stop Norwegians from outdoor activities, as I heard many of my co-workers describe their busy weekends with family and friends on ski trips that allowed them to enjoy nature and the fresh air.

At Solbakken Skole where I worked as a resource teacher, the Norwegian relaxed attitude towards nature and the different kinds of weather conditions unfolded itself right in front of me as I watched children outdoors and in the school yard. Solbakken Skole is located next to a small wood and I became intrigued with how natural it was for the children and the rest of the (Norwegian) staff to be outside in all sorts of weather.

Even though Solbakken Skole did not appear in any way to be different from the public schools in the U.S I was accustomed to, the attitudes of children and staff regarding nature and the outdoors were different. The children continued to play instead of running inside when it started to rain; when it snowed, they immediately adjusted their play to incorporate the new element, snow, and continued outside. The children did not even appear to notice how cold it was. The youngsters had developed a “synchronicity” with the different seasons and adjusted their play and movements to the conditions outside so naturally that I became motivated to investigate the nature facet of *Norwegianess* further.

There were many questions I wanted answers to: What kind of childhood is being constructed in Norway? Why is it so important for Norwegians to be outside in nature? What happens when children are in nature? What is the meaning of nature in Norway? What are teachers’

opinions about being outside in all kinds of weather? What are the ideas of non-Norwegian parents regarding Norwegians and nature?

Being non ethnic-Norwegian myself, I was especially interested in investigating what kind of influence the Norwegian attitude to nature had on non- Norwegians, so I decided to focus my research on the opinions of non -Norwegian parents and teachers regarding their own and their children's / students' experience with nature, "the Norwegian way", in and out of school. In addition, I wanted to compare their ideas to those of Norwegian parents. This rationale led me the formulation of the research questions below.

1.1 Main Research Questions

These were the initial inquiries which, after much reflection, culminated with this thesis which has the following two Main Research Questions:

- *What are the points-of-view of parents and teachers about the role of school-practices-in-nature in school in communities with many non-ethnic-Norwegian families?*

In other words, my objective is to explore the opinions of all parents, ethnic and non-ethnic-Norwegian, about the importance of nature-related experiences throughout the entire year in all kinds of weather for their children as a part of school practice in a multi-ethnic school. Furthermore, I am also interested in investigating teachers' opinions about the role of nature in the curriculum and in school practice. It is therefore interesting to explore whether there are any tensions between teaching outside and teaching inside the classroom.

The second *Main-Research Question* asks:

- *In the opinion of parents and teachers, what are the benefits, if any, of school-practices-in-nature to children's learning?*

The second main research question builds upon the first main research question and focus on teachers' and parents' opinions about the possible positive effects of school-practices-in-

nature on children's learning. This main research question is addressed to all three groups: ethnic-Norwegian parents, non-ethnic-Norwegian parents and teachers.

Additionally, I have the following two *Sub-Research Questions*:

- 1.) *How are the opinions of non-ethnic-Norwegian parents about school-practices-in-nature similar or different from the opinions of ethnic-Norwegian parents?*

In other words, my aim is to explore the perceptions of non-ethnic-Norwegian parents regarding nature practices in school. Many non-Norwegian parents have perhaps attended schools in other countries where learning took place solely inside the classroom, so what ideas do they have about their children's participation in school-practices-in-nature? What reflections do non ethnic-Norwegian parents have concerning nature's place in their children's school-day? How do those ideas compare to those of Norwegian parents? The aim of this research question is to provide additional support to the first main research question.

Furthermore, I also wish to investigate the following theoretical Sub-Research Question:

- 2.) *How are school-practices-in-nature a part of Norwegianess?*

In contrast to the other research questions, which are empirical, this is a theoretical sub-research question. This sub-research question has a double purpose. The first purpose is to expound on the concept of Norwegianess. How is Norwegianess understood in this thesis? And also: how does the concept of *Norwegianess*, as it is used in this thesis, relevant to the curriculum and school practice? The second purpose is to explicate the connections between school-practices-in-nature and *Norwegianess* and to elaborate on the idea that school-practices in-nature are immersed in *Norwegianess*. Finally, this last sub-research question wishes to know how *Norwegianess* can be passed on to a new generation of school children through school-practices-in-nature.

1.2 Teaching Norwegianess

According to many researchers, conceptions of a good life in the Norwegian cultural context rest upon vast exposure to outdoor life and extensive experience in nature throughout the

different seasons regardless of weather conditions (N. Witoszek, 2011; D. Nilsen, 2008; M. Gullestad, 1996). This close relationship to nature which involves participation in experiences in the natural world is a part of what Nina Witoszek (2011) labels *Norwegianess*. According to her, one of the elements of *Norwegianess* is a culturally present feeling of partnership with nature that is shared by many Norwegians of all ages and social groups.

This is not to say that other cultures do not possess a relationship to nature. But what I study here is the *particular* form the relationship to nature takes in Norway. It is this side of *Norwegianess*, the closeness to nature, as it is constructed at an ordinary, multiethnic school in Oslo that will be investigated in this thesis.

Another way to rephrase my objective is to say that I will investigate how children's experience of interplay with nature by means of school-practices-in-nature and *Norwegianess* is perceived by the informants and finally, what kind of reflections the interactions with nature impart on parents and teachers.

J. Bruner (1996) states that *education is a major embodiment of a culture's way of life, not just a preparation for it*. Thus, if we apply Bruner's words to Norway, we can conclude that schools in this country are among the most important embodiments of the Norwegian way of life. Indeed, since being comfortable in the outdoors in all kinds of weather is a fundamental part of the Norwegian culture and lifestyle, Norwegian schools are very important in teaching and transmitting this cultural tradition. Because of the above and additional reasons elucidated in the Theoretical Framework Chapter, in this thesis I refer to children's participation in school practices that involve repeated nature experiences in Norway, as *Construction of Norwegianess*. In addition, I have labeled the school practices that involve repeated nature experiences as "school-practices-in-nature".

It is clear that Norwegian children are not the only ones who play in nature or who participate in field trips, but I contend that the relationship that children and adults have to nature in Norway is idiosyncratic and starts for many children even before they reach school age. This is so evident for all to see, that after having lived a few weeks in Norway, I was in a position to agree with R. Dyblie Nilsen (2008, p. 53) when she stated:

The value of nature and spending time in the fresh air is not just connected to constructions of a proper childhood. It is generally accepted that special ideas about [outdoor activities] and a close relationship with nature are culturally dominant in Norway.

Furthermore, in Norway children are viewed as *important citizens and bearers of national culture*. In fact, children are considered important agents in the reproduction of cultural practices (Dyblie Nilsen, 2008, p. 54). Thus, it comes as no surprise that the government should also expect nature activities to be a part of children's lives, not only for this generation but for the ones to come. The following illustrates my statement:

To maintain outdoor life as an important leisure activity in the future, subsequent generations must experience nature and have the opportunity to develop skills, in order that they will want to and be capable of walking about in the woods and fields (Miljøverndepartementet, 2001, p.11).

The above quote illustrates the importance of outdoor life which is a type of partnership with nature in Norway. Outdoor life is a *modus vivendi*, which can only be fully enjoyed when a person has experienced it so many times, that he or she acquires an understanding of it. For many children of non-ethnic-Norwegian background, their only chance of acquiring this experience and therefore this understanding of outdoor life is through participation in school-practices-in- nature while they attend school in Norway. Nevertheless, it is important to clarify that my objective is not to claim that all Norwegians are avid practitioners of outdoor life. My point is that it is important to have an *understanding* of outdoor life since it is so much a part of what is valued and present in Norwegian culture as a whole. The common saying *Children in Norway are born with skis on their feet*, which refers to ethnic-Norwegian children, clearly illustrates my argument.

1.3 Objective and Chapter Overview

This thesis investigates constructions of “*Norwegianess*” at a public school in Oslo, Norway. These constructions are studied through the narratives of parents and teachers describing second grade children's nature experiences in and out of school at an ordinary elementary school in Oslo. The study focuses on school and family practices relating to nature and outdoor life and their interconnection with the concept of *Norwegianess*.

In this first Chapter, “Introduction”, I begin by giving an overview of the topics to be covered in the different chapters. I will also define *Norwegianess* as it will be used in this thesis.

In Chapter 2, I present a brief sketch of the social-historical landscape in nineteenth century Norway, highlighting the role of nature in the establishment of the Norwegian national identity in order to elucidate the cultural-historical influences of the current Norwegian identity related to their nature. This is done mainly through the work of Nina Witoszek and Nils Faarlund. Secondly, I include a brief summary of the different terms that have been used to refer to nature-oriented practices in Norway and in some countries in Europe, both in and out of school. In addition, another item included in Chapter 2 is the current trend in the Norwegian political debate on education. Finally, I review the current Norwegian curriculum, *Kunnskapsløftet*, to ascertain what position nature and the outdoors occupy in it. My aim in Chapter 2 is to lay the historical foundation for the particular school practices relating to nature which I will investigate in this thesis.

In Chapter 3, I analyze some pertinent theoretical frameworks that were used as lenses through which I looked at and understood the social-cultural practices connected to nature that occur in Norwegian public schools, that, as previously explained (1.2), have been labeled, *school-practices-in-nature*. These theories were essential and have guided my observations and reflections on the data from the interviews with parents and teachers. They have also helped me interpret the results of this research study. Dorothy Holland's et al's (2001) concepts of *Figured Worlds* and J. Lave and E. Wenger's (1991) "*Communities of Practice*," were vital tools for analyzing the interview material for Teachers and parents. In addition, another meaningful concept was Bruner's "Folk Pedagogy" which proved to be a good tool for discussing teaching approaches.

In Chapter 4, I present the Methodology applied in this study; I also introduce the informants and discuss the choice of "Solbakken" school. In addition, I justify my choice of the research interview as means of constructing knowledge. In the last part of Chapter 4, I discuss issues of reliability, validity and generalizability as they apply to this investigation.

In Chapters 5, 6 and 7 we hear the voices of the parents and teachers who are directly responsible for interpreting the curriculum and adapting it to their particular contexts: the narratives from the interviews are presented and analyzed in detail utilizing the theoretical frameworks and concepts presented earlier in this Introduction and in Chapter 3. In Chapter 5, I present and analyze the research interviews with non-ethnic-Norwegian parents and in Chapter 6 I analyze the responses given by ethnic-Norwegian parents. In Chapter 7, I examine the research interview answers given by the teachers. Chapter 8, "Discussion in the Light of

the Research Findings”, where I present the discussion of the research findings, is the concluding chapter of this thesis. In that chapter all the data are evaluated with regards to the theoretical frameworks; in addition, the findings are divided into themes which are also discussed. Furthermore, the connection between school-practices-in-nature, Norwegianess and Education for Sustainability is discussed.

2 Background

2.1 Nature in Norway: A Historical Glimpse

According to the view of the cultural historian Nina Witoszek (2011), Norwegians have “an identity based on a partnership with nature”. In her book, the *Origins of the Regime of Goodness*, she performs a detailed analysis of the historical and cultural role of nature in Norway. Her analysis traverses the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and continues on to the present time. She unveils the path of nature memes in Norway and meanders through the sublime landscape of nineteenth century Literature Romanticism in Europe, with their abundance of nature metaphors and imagery. Witoszek contends that nature in Norwegian culture travelled a road of “realism, balance and clarity” (Witoszek, 2011)

According to her, the unique aspect of Norwegian culture is the presence of a Norwegian nature- related ethos that has for the most part been connected with “emancipatory yet peaceful ideologies” (Witoszek, 2011). In other words, nature in Norway has been fundamental in the establishment of the Norwegian identity as a nation but it has not been the inspiration for territorial wars or conquests. In Norway, despite the fact that nature has been used as *a place* of belonging and as a symbol of national identity, it has not been used as an excuse for imperialist territorial conquests.

Notwithstanding Norway’s major transformation from a poor agricultural country to being one of the richest countries in the world, nature has continued to be a part of Norwegian national identity. I concur with Witoszek’s insightful observation that nature *has been a semiotic center around which everything moves*. Nature holds a central place in Norwegian culture: it constantly appears on headlines in all major newspapers and on television programs such as *Alt for Norge*, *71 degrees North* and so many others. Nature is in children’s books and adult books; it is in songs that people sing. Children and their parents, students and retirees, all meet in the *marka*, in the woods, on weekdays and on weekends, all year long, in all types of weather. Witoszek reflects: “it is as if the very observation of nature’s ways – based on preserving rhythms, repetitions, and the necessity of adaptation—has been transferred to a national adaptive code” (Witoszek, 2011). Norwegians adapt to the different seasons and

types of weather with a seemingly built-in synchronicity to the changes that surprises outsiders.

Witoszek considers the Håvamål, the medieval secular book of survival, to be one of the pillars of Norwegian culture. She hypothesizes that if a book could explain the *modus vivendi* of a whole culture, then, the Håvamål is such a book. Its fundamental messages —*be smart but not too smart, tolerant but not too tolerant, kind but not too kind, and above all else, better alive than dead*— reverberate a utilitarianism which has ruled Norway for centuries. She theorizes that the Håvamål fostered a system of knowledge that has connected Norwegians to the wisdom of modesty and pragmatism and its message has been transmitted across the centuries and can still be heard in the works and philosophy of Arne Næss. Thus according to her, Næss' work, which reflects a profound respect and understanding of the rhythms and needs of nature and its creatures, is a consequence of his historical-cultural roots in Norway, a culture strongly influenced by the philosophy of the Håvamål.

In Witoszek's (2011) view, this utilitarianism developed throughout the centuries into a way of being for Norwegians. Clearly, it was reinforced because of the need for practical creativity in a harsh environment, and by the necessity to survive in challenging circumstances. In Norway nature memes have continued to represent strong symbols of national *goodness* and be connected to the goodness of the land. Witoszek states that nowadays, a tradition based upon the history and imagery of nature still influences Norwegian culture. It is an inheritance *with which people identify, which they personify and personifies them*. It also influences their style of communication, their national ethos, literary genres, cultural heroes, national rituals, leisure, work and school practices.

The foundation of humanism, the acknowledgement of the equal and unalienable rights of all human beings as members and of the same human family and of their inherent worth is given an additional dimension with the accretion of values originating from a human being's experience of nature which is the Eco-humanist aspect of Norwegian identity, according to Witoszek. Eco-humanism is based on the knowledge and understanding of nature's ways and tempered by the awareness of restrictions inherent both in society and in nature.

With the above as a backdrop, the next section deals with the challenges and changes associated with immigration.

2.2 The Impact of Immigration

Norwegian society has been considered ethnically homogeneous by many, as wrote Social Anthropologist, Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2013). Seen from a historical perspective, ethnic minorities have not been so numerous in Norway, with the exception of the Sami in the Northern part of the country. The “National minorities” include Jews, Romani (a mixed group of partly Gypsy origin), Roma (from Southeast Europe), and Kyens (of Finnish origin). Eriksen reports that the population numbers for these groups are not precise since “National minorities” are not statistically registered by ethnicity (Eriksen, 2013). Approximate numbers are 15,000 Kvens, 1,500-2,000 Jews, 2,000-3,000 Romani and 400 Roma which are relatively small numbers compared to the ethnic Norwegian majority. Nevertheless, in the last few decades Norwegian society’s apparent homogeneous image has begun to shatter.

It is common knowledge that Norway is one of the world’s most attractive countries for immigration, with its well-functioning democratic government, welfare and freedom. In fact, since the late sixties Norway has been “a net importer of people” (Eriksen, 2005). Previous to 1975, the majority of immigrants from non-Western countries came from Pakistan and Turkey in search of jobs. In 1975, there was a general ban on immigration from non-Nordic countries. As a result of that ban, citizens from non-Nordic countries could only immigrate to Norway through family reunification or as refugees (Eriksen, 2005). However, that situation changed somewhat in 2004 with the European Union enlargement which allows free movement among its member states. Although Norway is not a member of the European Union, it has signed the Schengen free movement agreement, and it has many policies in accordance with European Union policies, including the one on labor migration.

From 1995 to 2011 the number of first and second generation immigrants rose drastically from 215,000 to 600,000. Of this population 100,000 are Norwegians, born to immigrant parents; the remainder is first-generation immigrants (Eriksen, 2005). The two largest groups of immigrants are Swedes and Poles, but because they are EU residents, they are not registered as European migrants. According to Eriksen, in present day “discourse the word immigrant does not apply to Swedes and Poles, but rather connotes non-Europeans, usually, Muslim” (Eriksen, 2005). According to him, in Norway there are about 180,000 people who come from predominantly Muslim countries.

This immigrant population consists, for the most part, of persons from developing countries in Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe who are attracted to the Norwegian living standards with access to all the benefits named above plus education, health care and legal rights (Rana, 2007). Because it is a fact that immigration to Norway will continue to happen and influence Norwegian mainstream culture long into the future, it is crucial for Norway to be prepared to face this challenge which will test society's flexibility and knowledge of immigration issues even more.

Indeed, Bruner affirms that the idea of culture as an established, fixed manner of behaving, thinking, and judging is not a "very useful fiction" any more (Bruner, 1996, p. 97). Cultures have always undergone processes of continuous change and these changes occur more rapidly as a function of migration, information exchange and globalization. When one thinks of the inevitability of immigration, one must also consider the crucial need for schools to be prepared to show those new young children and their families that learning is for everyone regardless of background. This thesis shows, in addition, that learning and integration can be fostered simultaneously—in nature. It also shows that understanding *Norwegianess* and being integrated in Norwegian culture go hand-in-hand and can be fostered through school-practices-in-nature. In the next section another approach that is relevant to the study of school-practices-in-nature will be reviewed.

2.3 A Relevant Approach

2.3.1 Friluftsliv and School-Practices-in-Nature: Important concepts

Nature is everywhere in Norway; *It is right outside your door*, as a friend once said. Perhaps that is why it was not particularly easy to define precisely what facet of *nature* would be investigated in this study. For the purposes of this thesis, I will examine parents' and teachers' opinions about *school-practices-in nature*.

School-practices-in-nature are defined in this thesis as the activity of *being outside* in a non-

urbanized area on school outings or trips, lasting anywhere from 1 hour to several days, as part of school-practice.

My initial expectation, before I actually began doing research for this thesis, was that I would have difficulty keeping afloat in a sea of information on nature in schools in Norway. I was therefore quite unprepared to discover that the mountain of publications on the theme of nature in schools became reduced to a small hill. Nevertheless, there are some important works I will be referring to throughout this chapter and the next. It is crucial for anyone doing research on nature in Norway, in whatever form or whatever context, to dedicate some time to understand the word *friluftsliv* which, according to Faarlund, Dahle and Jensen (2007) cannot be easily translated into a foreign language. There are different translations in the English language, many of them adequate but always somewhat removed from the original meaning in Norwegian. For the purpose of this investigation, I will use the expression *outdoor life* as the most adequate translation.

According to Karl-August Haslestad's (2000) comprehensive research on the use of the term *friluftsliv*, it was in Thoreau's (1854) classic work "Walden" that the first reference to *outdoor* life was made. It described "life in close contact with nature and simple means" (Thoreau, 1854). That expression became a kind of *authorized* description of life in the outdoors which was accepted by his many readers in Europe. However, according to Haslestad's, the word "friluftsliv" is understood by many in Scandinavia as a special Norwegian word. Because of that, it has become very important for many Norwegians to identify the first time it was used in written Norwegian. According to his research, it was in 1859 in Ibsen's sixty four stanza poem "Paa Vidderne" that "friluftsliv" appeared in written Norwegian for the first time (Haslestad, 2000).

Many authors claim that there is considerable agreement that "friluftsliv", at least in the form it is practiced nowadays in Norway, has origins and roots in Norway. It arose as an experience-driven, not usefulness-driven activity in the end of the nineteenth century and it quickly achieved a very important place, especially among the cultural elite (Haslestad, 2000). In this investigation of school-practices-in-nature, another concept of importance that resembles my approach will be introduced in the next section. It is the concept of "Outdoor Learning" (Uteskole).

Several researchers share the view that creating new types of learning situations consisting of other learning arenas, such as learning in nature, starting in elementary school may represent possible deterrent elements for school failure (Jordet, 2007; Haslestad, 2000; Beames, Higgins & Nicol, 2011). According to Jordet (2007), the benefits of learning in nature are innumerable and are shown throughout his research. Even though his research was on *Outdoor Learning* and not specifically *Norwegianess*, many aspects of *Outdoor Learning* are relevant for this study on *The Construction of One's Norwegianess in Schools*.

Jordet (1998, p. 24) defined *Outdoor Learning* in the following way:

Outdoor Learning is a way of working with the school curriculum where parts of everyday life in school are moved out of the classroom—into the local environment. Outdoor Learning implies frequent and purpose driven activities outside the classroom. Outdoor Learning is about activating all the school subjects in an integrated training where activities out-of-doors and indoors are closely linked together. The pupils learn in an authentic context—that is: they learn about nature in nature, about society in the society and about the local environment in the local environment.

Although the concept of Outdoor Learning encompasses more than the scope of this thesis, which is to investigate the Construction of One's Norwegianess in schools through school-practices-in-nature, many of the motivating factors and benefits for the students are the same. When students are in nature with the objective of acquiring firsthand experience on a particular subject in the curriculum, they are also given ample possibilities to use their senses and bodies. According to the aforementioned researchers, in addition to the academic benefits, learning in nature offers the students a multitude of opportunities to practice and develop their social skills, fine and gross motor skills, observational skills, fantasy, spontaneity, curiosity, communication, endurance and self-esteem, among other benefits. It should be pointed out that the objective of this investigation or Outdoor Learning is not to undermine the importance of theoretical knowledge, quite the opposite; it is to give it additional purpose and meaning. According to Jordet's research "a school that uses books in the classroom in combination with Outdoor Learning in order to develop knowledge will contribute to better" achievement (Jordet, 2007).

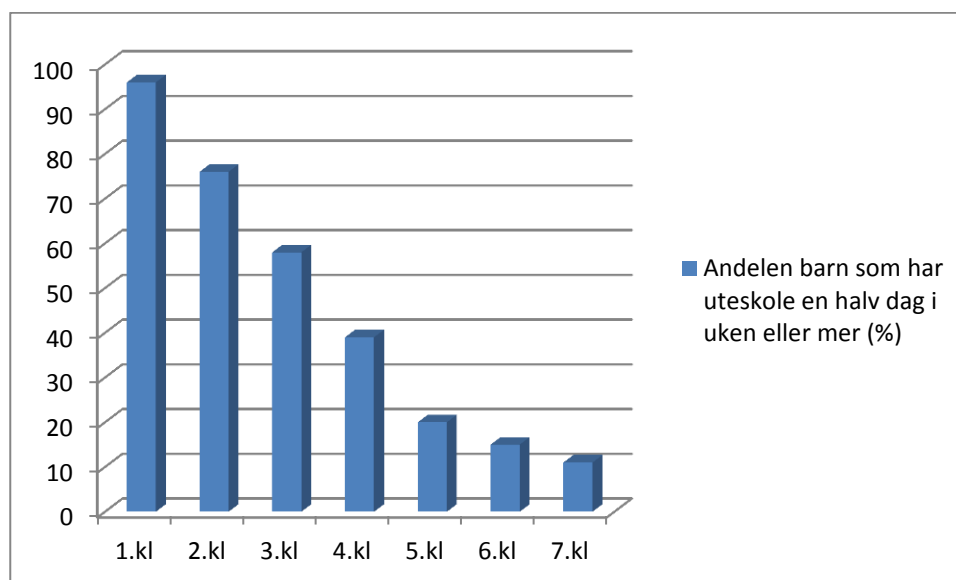
2.3.2 Outdoor Learning

The concept of *Uteskole* (Outdoor Learning) appeared more consistently in Norwegian schools in the last fifteen years after the implementation of L97. Despite the fact that teaching outside the classroom was conducted in many schools before this, it appears that the concept

has been more generally used in Norwegian schools since L97 became implemented. (Jordet, 2007, p. 21) Other terms such as *day out* (utedag), *field trip day* (turdag) have also been used, depending on the teacher's objectives with the arrangement. In this section *Uteskole* will be referred to as *Outdoor Learning*.

In the year 2000, The National Council on Nutrition and Physical Activity (Statens Råd for Ernæring og Fysisk Aktivitet) conducted a survey over the entire country whose objective was to record the frequency of Outdoor Learning according to grade level (1-7) (Bjelland & Klepp, 2000). It appears that Outdoor Learning was widely practiced in elementary school, especially in the first three grade levels. The results can be seen in the graph below.

Figure 1: Number of students who have Outdoor Learning half a day a week or more (%)



Source (Mjaavatn et al. 2004; Jordet, 2007, p. 22)

As we can see from the graph above, 90% of the students in first grade had Outdoor Learning half a day a week or more. The time spent in Outdoor Learning diminishes gradually throughout the first seven years of school and becomes reduced to only 10% in seventh grade. Another way of interpreting the graph is to say that if all the classes from first to fourth grade were to be joined together, it could be estimated that around two out of three classrooms would have Outdoor Learning half a day a week or more, while in the intermediary grades (fifth, sixth and seventh) Outdoor Learning would occur in circa one out of six classes. One

conclusion can be that Outdoor Learning appears to be quite common during the first four years of elementary school but becomes less frequent for higher grades (Jordet, 2007).

According to Jørgensen (1999) the time invested in Outdoor Learning should be integrated as much as possible with the rest of the learning that takes place inside the classroom. That means there should be a connection with schoolwork and the rest of the other subjects and it should include groundwork, planning, follow-up and evaluation. Jørgensen thus perceives Outdoor Learning as a teaching method and emphasizes its simultaneous interaction with the teaching happening inside the classroom. Additionally, Outdoor Learning should be practiced regularly involves teachers and students leaving the classroom and going outside to another type of learning environment, outside the school and using it as a learning arena. Moreover, it also includes the next stage which is taking the experience gained outside and bringing it back to school for further processing (Jørgensen, 1999).

2.3.3 Theory and Practice

This section is particularly important since the ways of sharing the appropriate knowledge and teaching the skills contained in the curriculum are under the responsibility of the teacher. This section offers a brief overview of the use and sharing of knowledge in practice, mainly by teachers, but also by school staff and parents. An additional importance stems from the fact that, in Chapters 7 and 8 the views of teachers regarding school-practices-in-nature will be analyzed and discussed; at that point, references will be made to different teaching approaches contained herein.

Jerome Bruner affirms that the application of theoretical knowledge to practical situations always presents a challenge. The challenge consists in applying the knowledge in order to solve a real issue in a living context. In the case of this research study we reflect upon the application of knowledge in classrooms at a Norwegian school. Bruner urges us to reflect upon the fact that our interactions with others are deeply affected by our everyday intuitive theories about how other minds work. Similarly in schools, those who assist children in learning about the world are also guided by their personal notions of how children's minds work (Bruner, 1996, p. 45).

Parents' and Teachers' Beliefs

When we observe parents, school staff or teachers with children, we also witness the kinds of beliefs these adults have on what children's minds are like, and how best to assist youngsters learn. Bruner states that even if people sometimes are not able to explain what their pedagogical principles are, those principles are always present. Focusing more specifically on teaching, any educational theorist who wishes to introduce innovation will necessarily have to compete with the practices that are being utilized in that classroom setting (Bruner, 1996, p. 46).

Moreover, it is general knowledge that teachers today make efforts to adapt their teaching to the backgrounds and abilities of their students, however, a discussion on the types of efforts made by teachers is beyond the scope of this thesis. My objective in this section is to present Bruner's view on the tacit ways learners' minds are thought about and the kind of pedagogical practices that follow from these ways of thinking about mind.

I believe it is an important theme because pedagogical practices in classrooms are founded on teachers' beliefs about learners' minds. It is the decision of each individual teacher the way to teach the types of knowledge and skills that are described in the curriculum.

According to Bruner there are four main beliefs about learners' minds that have been dominant in the last several decades. One of these beliefs is that a learner can be thought of as "imitative" or the type of person who learns from didactic exposure. In addition, a learner can be thought of as a thinker or as a knowledgeable individual. I will provide further explanations in what follows.

Imitative Learners

This belief has to do with the acquisition of skills and know-how. It is also the basis for apprenticeship training. The expert transmits to the newcomer skills that were learned through practice and repetition. According to Bruner there is little distinction between procedural knowledge (knowing how) and propositional knowledge (knowing that) (Bruner, 1996, p. 53).

A possible criticism to this position comes from the fact that it may demotivate creativity and damper motivation. In addition, Bruner mentions studies on expertise that show that learning by imitation alone does not provide the same level of flexibility as learning from a combination of practice and theoretical explanation (Bruner, 1996, p. 54).

Learning from Didactic Exposure

According to this approach learners should be exposed to facts, principles and rules of action which should be learned, memorized, and put into practice. This means that this approach assumes that learners are ignorant of certain types of knowledge that are to be learned by being told about them (Bruner, 1996, p. 55). In this kind of scenario, skills are not conceived as mastering how to do something but as the way to acquire knowledge by means of specific mental skills: verbal, spatial, numerical, interpersonal and so on. According to Bruner this is the most popular form of folk pedagogy practiced today. It is widely used in all the subjects: from mathematics, to geography; from science to social studies. Bruner's words can also be viewed as a warning against the excessive use of this approach. Its principal appeal is that it purports to offer a clear specification of just what it is that is to be learned and, equally questionable, that it suggests standards for assessing its achievement. More than any other theory of folk pedagogy, it has spawned objective testing in all its myriad guises (Bruner, 1996, p. 55).

It is clearly the case that there are situations where facts are important and our lives are full of facts. But facts alone are not what learning is about. The didactic exposure approach is clearly non- dialogical; on the contrary, it is one directional: from the teacher, who "possesses "the knowledge, to the learner who does not. The student's mind is perceived as a blank slate.

In the didactic exposure approach the ideas of the learner are not considered as important as her performance on evaluative assignments. If the child fails to perform, the responsibility is placed on the child who is thought to have failed to absorb the knowledge to be learned.

Learners as Thinkers: the Development of Dialogical Interchange

According to this approach children are viewed as thinkers who construct models of the world just as adults do. Teachers are interested in finding out what children think and how they reached that point. The task of pedagogy is therefore to assist children in achieving a higher level of understanding that is not so one-sided or limited. Knowledge is fostered through cooperation and discussion, and teachers encourage children to express their own points of view which are considered important elements in the discussions. This kind of pedagogy is dialogical and assumes that all human minds are capable of holding ideas and beliefs that can evolve towards a common point of view through discussion and interaction (Bruner, 1996, p. 56).

In this approach the child's own theories are brought into correspondence with those of parents and teachers not by imitation or by didactic instruction but by dialogic discussion and collaboration. Knowledge is the result of evidence, analysis, reflection, cooperation and discussion. This approach is concerned with reflection, interpretation and comprehension rather than with performance or the memorization of factual information alone (Bruner, 1996)

Children as Knowledgeable

Bruner explains that an excessive focus on discussions and negotiation may cause an overestimation of the importance of social interaction in knowledge construction. That situation may lead learners to underestimate the importance of past knowledge. All cultures maintain certain forms of past, reliable knowledge which are not easily open for immediate replacement. The fact that many kinds of knowledge may be open to revision does not imply that everything is relative and that all theories are equal. Children must understand that all knowledge has a history. This fourth view holds that teachers should help learners grasp the difference between cultural knowledge and personal knowledge. It also holds that there is valuable knowledge to be acquired when students and teachers interact with great authors of the past who are still alive in their works. However the objective of these "meetings" between great texts and students is interpretation and discussion and not plain admiration and memorization (Bruner, 1996, p. 62).

Teaching and Learning for Life

Effective teaching is not limited to one model of the learner or one type of pedagogy. Education in schools should be designed to convey skills, knowledge and understanding of facts and theories. Additionally, it should foster comprehension of traditions and beliefs of cultures near and far. However, it is crucial to bear in mind that any choice of pedagogical practice related to a certain subject, will imply a particular model of learner and of the learning process which the learner may subsequently adopt as his or her own model of the learning process associated with that subject. As Bruner perspicaciously observed, pedagogy is never innocent; it is a medium that carries its own message (Bruner, 1996, p. 63).

2.4 Political Debate: A More Diverse and Practical School Day

In the last several years there have been countless debates involving a collective body of researchers, educators, parents, students and policy makers regarding the situation of schools in Norway. There seems to be a general consensus that the approach to education in Norway has not been successful in motivating a substantial number of students. In fact, according to a document released by the Ministry of Education entitled “Strategy for Lower Secondary Education in Norway” (*Strategi for Ungdomstrinnet*) whose implementation started in the fall of 2012, it is stated that motivation for learning reaches its lowest point in lower secondary school. “Many students have the opinion that school routines are tedious. This causes numerous students to lag behind in their learning and some of them never complete lower secondary school” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2012). Perhaps because teaching has not been practical or diversified enough, some students do not promptly see the applicability of much of what they learn and the gap between what is taught in the classroom and the *real* world becomes a contributing factor to demotivate some students. In addition, many of those who manage to finish lower secondary education may continue to struggle with a demotivating school experience. This may end up being one of the main reasons for the failure of many in finishing high school.

The emphasis in “Strategy for Lower secondary Education” is on “Motivation-Mastering-Possibilities” which means a “more practical, varied, relevant and challenging” school experience for all the students in lower secondary school. The objective is to increase motivation, achievement and learning. Clearly, motivation is important to all students regardless of grade level, and this thesis represents a contribution to this debate since it investigates parents’ and teachers’ opinions about the impact of school-practices-in- nature on learning.

Furthermore, another document from the Ministry of Education which analyzes the 2010 Student Survey confirms the glum situation in lower secondary stating that:

There is a rather large group of students in tenth grade who are not especially interested in learning at school, who rarely do their homework and who seldom understand or listen to what the teacher says. Almost one of three students in tenth grade says that either they do not like school work very much, or they do not like it at all...(KL06).

The document states further that “the number of highly motivated students plummets from fifth grade to tenth grade... Motivation sinks also with age and the decrease begins in elementary school. “It does not appear therefore that it is primarily a specific situation in school in itself that explains the lower motivation in lower secondary school” (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2010). There are diverse elements in schools, in the different classes and in the learning environment that combined may have a substantial influence in a student’s motivation for learning. There can be external factors such as different types of rewards, or there can be subjective reasons as when a student has a special interest on a theme and wants to learn as much as possible about it without any consideration about an external reward. It usually happens that there are several elements playing a role in a student’s motivation in a given situation, and they can be motivated by different factors depending on the circumstances (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2010). Nevertheless, it is important to investigate the possibilities created by other learning arenas, and this is one of the objectives in this master’s thesis.

2.5 Development of Curricula

This section is based on my study of the current curriculum and on the historical analysis from the research of A. H. Jordet (2007; 2010).

Because in the curriculum it is stated that *the objectives and tasks of schools are established, in the light of what at any given time are the prevailing political and educational thoughts of a society*, I believe it is crucial to examine the role of nature in the present curriculum. It is also important to investigate whether nature has historically been a part of former curricula in order to understand the kind of tradition nature has had in Norwegian schools.

2.5.1 Historical Development

Regarding formal education in schools, the curriculum is the most important document about teaching. It guides all instruction, outlines the skills, performances, attitudes, and values students are expected to attain as a result of school attendance. It incorporates instructional goals, desired student outcomes, descriptions of materials and places, the recommended instructional sequence that should be used in order to assist students reach the required goals, how proficient a student should be in a certain skill, among many other requirements. The present curriculum KL06 or *The National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion*, (*Kunnskapsløftet*), from this point on referred to as “KL06”, is the current embodiment of decades of predecessors. An overview of the kinds of curricula that preceded KL06, is a necessary step in this master’s thesis involving schools, teachers and school-practices-in-nature in order that the present curriculum and the role of nature in school can be seen in a historical perspective.

A Brief Historical Overview

This section presents a brief overview of the main aspects of some of the most influential curricula that preceded KL06.

The idea of using the physical environment and the school surroundings as learning resources is not a new fact in education. Actually, this thought can be traced back to the nineteenth century and to the different educational and philosophical currents of that time. What is central for this investigation is to determine what kind of traces they have left in Norwegian curricula, especially the current one, National Curriculum for the Knowledge Promotion, *Kunnskapsløftet*, also known as KL06. Curricula are, undoubtedly, the most important managing tool for schools, in the words of A. H. Jordet (2010, p. 211; translated by the Author).

The Norwegian curriculum of 1939 (Normalplanen av 1939, N39) represented a breakthrough with the old educational mentality and the philosophy it represented has continued to have an influence on Norwegian curricula since that time. It was strongly influenced by the ideas of the so called Reform Pedagogy where the thoughts about student activity and the relationship between the school and the local society were fundamental. N39 represented a shift away from a teacher centered classroom, characterized by a "dissemination" type pedagogy, to a student centered, more activity based pedagogy and it was influenced both by the German and the American Reform Pedagogies. Two principles became fused together in the Normal Plan of 1939: student activity and the local society. The new ideology in school politics viewed students as active and resourceful youths in search of knowledge in the local environment (Jordet, 2010).

This extract exemplifies well the new educational philosophy:

They (the students) shall also speak, not only listen. They shall learn to investigate something and go to the source. They shall ask at home, they shall go to libraries, museums and to places where they can learn about the issues. This manner of working is natural. This is the way to proceed when a person wants to learn something later in life, also: research, ask, talk and read (Jordet, 2010).

The 1987 Curriculum: “Mønsterplanen av 1987 (M87)” came to life as a result of the revisions of the M74 curriculum. The socially critical 70’s had laid the foundation for further changes towards placing education, and schools in particular, in a broader and more socially oriented context. It was the era of questioning and criticism: nothing should be taken for granted, including the contents of what was being taught at school. The meaning of local knowledge was placed in contrast to the general content that students learned at school. The methods and content of what was being taught at school were perceived as alienating and distant from reality. Emphasis was on the local reality, in local knowledge and local issues (Jordet, 2010). M87 was based on the idea that school should emphasize students’ experiences in their own lives outside the classroom. In many other countries there was the birth of a liberating pedagogy, inspired by the ideas of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. In Norway, those ideas took a new shape and manifested themselves in the form of interest for local policies and issues. During that time, many topics from the local society found a place in the classroom. In terms of methods, it was necessary to have students who were active participants: they observed, collected data, classified and reported on their findings. In addition, there were more possibilities for a close cooperation between schools and local companies or organizations. It was those questioning ideas which gave rise to M87 where students were portrayed as researchers in their local environment (Jordet, 2010).

In the Curriculum for the 10 Year Basic School, L97, the national government’s control of the knowledge to be acquired at school became much stronger. The role and meaning of each subject became reinforced and the curriculum established guidelines for the contents of what should be learned at school for all grade levels. Students’ active participation remained fundamental and so did the idea that students should play an active role in the local environment, find ideas in the local surroundings, and draw inspiration from the many learning sources that are available outside the classroom.

2.6 The New School Policy Climate

After the year 2000, there was a change in the school policy atmosphere due to new knowledge about the situation in Norwegian schools. The increased emphasis on school research and international tests in the last two decades apparently painted a less optimistic picture of the situation at schools than previously envisioned. Nowadays, there seems to be a tendency for an individualized education which comes as a hopeful solution to the challenges schools are confronting, among those the need for adapted education. The meaning of adapted education has been reinterpreted, with more weight being placed in the importance of the learning community in individual learning. This new direction comes as a result of the growing interest in the social cultural perspective in education. The next section summarizes how this new socio political landscape is reflected in the present curriculum, KL06, from 2006. Social cultural theory states that the ways schools work with curriculum content are decisive in determining what kinds of competences students will have. I concur with Jordet when he states that the way to work with a particular topic in school and the choice of types of activities connected to a certain topic must be seen in light of the competences that the students are supposed to develop according to the curriculum. In other words, it is the curriculum contents that have a crucial influence on the choice of working methods.

Jordet posed an important question which I will paraphrase to connect with the subject of this thesis (Jordet, 2010).

Do school-practices-in nature represent a type of optional approach to teaching, which individual teachers or schools can include or exclude, depending on a teacher's or a school's local preferences?

In order to answer this question, I will examine some parts of the present curriculum KL06.

General Part

There were no changes in Curriculum Part 1, General Part. That means that the two last curricula stipulate that schools should use school surroundings and the local environment as resources in teaching. Thus nature and outdoor activities are also a part of the conceptual foundation for KL06. Moreover, nature appears throughout the General Part of the present curriculum. The overall text of the General part has remained unaltered since L97, reflecting

the continued importance of nature in the current curriculum and thus in children's learning in Norway. The following extract illustrates my statement:

...Education must enkindle a sense of joy in physical activity and nature's grandeur, of living in a beautiful country, in the lines of a landscape, and the changing seasons. It should awaken a sense of awe towards the unexplainable, induce pleasure in outdoor life and nourish the urge to wander off the beaten track and into uncharted terrain; to use body and senses to discover new places and to explore the world. Outdoor life touches us in body, mind and soul. Education must corroborate the connection between understanding nature and experiencing nature...(Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2011).

It is quite clear from the above citation that children's connection to nature should be fostered through the work of schools. That means more than the mere reading about nature from a book: schools are to plant the seed of nature's grandeur in the fertile soil of a child's mind. The work of schools is not limited to teaching children to find the correct answer from a book inside the walls of a classroom. Among the objectives of the Norwegian curriculum is one that states that students are supposed, not only to understand nature, but also to experience it. This is certainly a culturally relevant objective that, in my judgment can only be attained if learning occurs both inside and outside the classroom on a regular basis. I conducted a similar analysis to Jordet (2010) and concluded that school practices-in- nature are included in KL06 both implicitly and explicitly. Since the detailed study of the curriculum is beyond the scope of this thesis, in what follows I offer only a few examples:

Example of an Implicit Reference to Outdoor Learning in KL06

My translation of KL06's last statement from the Introduction is:

"Briefly, the objective of teaching is to expand an individual's capacity to recognize and experience, to empathize, express and participate" (KL06: Introduction).

Since the word *experience* means: *practical knowledge, skill or practice derived from direct observation of or participation in events or in a particular activity (Webster, 2014)*, my conclusion about the objective above is that it refers to students having direct contact with the topic to be studied. As an example, when a class takes a trip to a forest nearby, then the students have actually *experienced* the forest, not just talked about it. Moreover, they have experienced it together, which is a way of constructing camaraderie, affiliation and a sense of belonging. These are important elements in school motivation.

Explicit References to Outdoor Learning in KL06

The “General Part” of the curriculum also *explicitly* stipulates that the school surroundings should be used in teaching:

Local society with its nature and working life is itself a vital part of the learning environment of schools(...) teaching must in general initiate contact with the schools' neighborhood and use the resources that are in their surroundings. (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2011).

It is clear from the excerpt above that there must be communication between schools and their surrounding areas which are to be utilized as a knowledge source and as an extension of the classroom. The use of the verb “must” leaves no room for a choice not to use nature and the environment outside the school: the natural environment must be included in teaching/learning.

In the next section I will sketch the way important learning principles are dealt with in the Subject part of KL06.

2.7 Curriculum Kunnskapsløftet: Subject Curriculum

Competence Objectives in the Curriculum KL06

The current curriculum stipulates competence objectives after the second, fourth, seventh, and tenth grades. This means that pupils in first and second grades work towards the competence objectives to be reached after the second grade. Pupils in third and fourth grades work towards the competence objectives to be achieved after the fourth grade and so on.

I will follow Jordet’s (2010) rationale for the purpose of this **summary** of the ways in which nature and the outdoors (Outdoor Learning) may appear in the curriculum:

Jordet divides the competence objectives in three main competence categories; two of them are context- *independent*, while one of them is context- *dependent*. Context-independent competence objectives are those for which the curriculum has not given specific guidelines for what kinds of learning arenas must be used in teaching. Context- dependent competence objectives are those for which the curriculum gives guidelines for the use of specific learning

arenas outside the classroom. Those guidelines can be explicit or implicit (Jordet: 2010; translated by the author). In what follows, I will briefly outline explanations and give some illustrative examples for those different competence categories.

Competence Objective Type 1 (Context Independent Objective)

The first type of competence objective is context independent and it is connected to being able to reproduce educational content as it is found in textbooks. In addition, students will be able to speak about different types of topics. In the curriculum, these objectives are formulated in the following way: *students must be able to describe, discuss, explain or present* a content area. The excerpt below is an example of this type of competence:

*Pupils shall be able to speak about the life cycle of some plants or animal species...
(Curriculum in Natural Science after fourth grade)*

This means that in order to achieve these objectives, teachers have choices: they may use textbooks, lectures or other teaching tools and remain in the classroom. However, it is also possible for teachers to use different alternatives as, for example, to have direct contact with some species of plants or animals in a class trip and afterwards, to describe or talk about life cycles of animals or plants.

Competence Objective Type 2 (Context Independent Objective)

The second type of competence objective is *context independent* and has to do with the ability to *evaluate, analyze or discuss a certain topic*. In this sense it has more to do with the application of acquired knowledge. Some examples are:

Students shall be able to discuss and elaborate on important changes in society in recent times and reflect on how today's society opens to new changes. (Curriculum in History after tenth grade)

The same situation happens as with the example above, teachers may choose to stay inside the classroom or they may decide to go on a field trip to a location related to the topic to be learned. In order to achieve this kind of competence, it is recommended that there be a **dialogical** learning environment. Teachers and students engage in interactions with active student and teacher participation. Explanations, discussions, evaluations and analyses of content materials are constantly carried out in class with the teacher as a model and advisor.

Competence Objective Type 3 (Context Dependent Objective)

According to this third competence objective, students must apply the knowledge and skills they already possess and, in the process, acquire new knowledge and skills in authentic learning situations outside school. Below are examples:

Students shall participate in various activities in nature and tell others about what has been observed (Curriculum in Natural Science after second grade)

Students shall talk about the perception of various types of houses and spaces in local environment (Curriculum in Arts and Crafts after second grade)

Students shall describe terrain formations and geographical terms by exploring the terrain around the school and their home (Curriculum in Geography after fourth grade)

As illustrated above, these competence objectives are supposed to be achieved in nature or in the environment outside the school. It is important to point out that the different subject curricula have objectives of this type which require the students to be in the natural environment, outside the classroom.

2.8 Summary

This chapter outlined the foundations for several of the ideas that are woven throughout this thesis. It included, among others topics, a short overview of the history of nature in Norway, some recent immigration figures and information about the relationship between grade level and outdoor learning. Chapter 2 also included clarifications about a few concepts that resemble school-practices-in-nature, a short summary of some curricula that preceded KL06, in addition to some useful distinctions among possible approaches to teaching. Finally, in the section above, I have outlined a few of the many competence objectives cited in the curriculum which are supposed to be taught *outside* the classroom, many of them in nature. One crucial challenge for any school teacher is to show the students the connections between what is taught *outside* and what is taught *inside* the classroom.

From what we have just seen in section 2.7, it is incorrect to conclude that the present curriculum gives the schools and teachers complete freedom of choice as to how they will teach certain topics.

3 Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

Soon I realized that moving to Norway meant that, beyond relocating to a different country, I had also moved to a different *reality*. Even those who come from neighboring countries such as Sweden or Denmark may agree that *things are different in Norway*. Initially, what made Norway so interesting to me was that the relationship that Norwegians have with nature is so different from what I had been used to from my experiences in Rio de Janeiro (South-Eastern Brazil) and in Los Angeles (Southern California). Images of Norwegians-in-nature are everywhere: on countless television documentaries, in Norwegians-in-nature programs for children and adults, in feature films showing the delights of Norwegians-in-summer-nature and the bravery of Norwegians-in-the-harsh-winter. There is, in addition, a seemingly endless outdoor (especially) television sports coverage throughout the entire year. I considered myself as an *experienced* immigrant (I had, after all, lived in England, Brazil and in the United States), therefore after I moved to Norway, I wanted to *fit in* as soon as possible and go on with my *new* life. For well over one year after my arrival, I thought it was just a matter of getting settled in my new home, learning the language and finding a job. It was only after I started working as a *resource teacher (spesial pedagog)* at Solbakken School and watching the children being socialized in Norwegian-nature-ways, that I realized that there was a kind of *parallel universe* those children were being introduced to, a world which had not been mentioned in my Norwegian language course, but whose contours I had begun to envision in the type of television shows I named above. Everything began to make sense after I read Holland et al's (2001) book, *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds*: I had entered *the figured world of Norwegianess*. More will be said about this in the following pages of this Theory Chapter.

3.2 School-Practices-in-Nature

School-Practices-in Nature as they are investigated in this thesis are described by parents and teachers based on experiences with their children and students, respectively. These practices include not only those that are connected to the teaching of certain subjects, for example, science or math, but also practices that are connected to nature appreciation, being outdoors or learning about school surroundings among others. I contend that, regardless of the formal reason why students are in nature, those students constitute a “Community of School Practices in Nature”. As we will learn from the interviews in Chapters 5 and 6, when children are outside, many of them behave differently from what they do inside. Moreover, when parents and teachers refer to the children’s experiences, they generally do not refer to them as being connected to a particular academic subject. In other words, the motivation for a specific nature practice may have been related to a certain skill or subject but the traditional division into subjects is a viewpoint that is usually connected to issues of practicality for teachers and staff at school. The division into subjects is more easily observed inside (different schedules for different subjects, books and artifacts associated with certain subjects) than outside. In my past experience as a teacher, on the many occasions when I was outdoors with students, I observed that they are often so busy trying to understand all the different stimuli they encounter in nature that most of them do not concern themselves whether they are outside as part of a Mathematics lesson or a Science class. However, inside the situation is usually different and the majority of students in school are quite aware of the “separation” between subjects. Some students, for example, may state that they do not like mathematics but enjoy science while indoors or vice versa. Outdoors, however, the separation between subjects becomes more blurred.

3.3 Constructing Norwegianess

Even though this thesis is not about *learning per se*, it is also *about* learning, since I am investigating the *construction* of a facet of Norwegianess. Thus, we are studying parents’ and teachers’ reflections about students *learning* to be in nature, the Norwegian way. In other

words, Norwegianness is learned in lived practice. In this chapter I explore theoretical approaches that can help elucidate my empirical findings.

During the last thirty years many changes have taken place concerning theories on *learning*. These changes have occurred as a result of some insightful research in diverse fields such as psychology, anthropology, sociology and others. Among those are the groundbreaking ethnographic studies performed by Holland, Lave and Wenger (Lave, 1988; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1999; Holland & Lave, 2001; Holland, Lachicotte, Cain & Skinner, 2001). Initially, though, I had to reflect upon the following question:

Why think of a social, rather than a psychological theory of learning?

I answer the above question using Jean Lave's (1996, p. 149) words:

To the extent that being human is a relational matter, generated in social living, historically, in social formations whose participants engage with each other as a condition and precondition for their existence, theories that conceive of learning as a special universal mental process impoverish and misrecognize.

Jean Lave points out another reason for choosing a social theory of learning: theories that reduce learning to individual mental processes or capabilities, place the responsibility of marginalization on the *marginalized people* (Lave, 1996, p. 149). Despite the fact that many of them may include the "environment" or the "social", they are still focused on the individual from start to finish. These types of theories are concerned with comparing individuals or groups of individuals in terms of *how much* learning, who is *better*, who is *worse* who learned *more* or who learned *less* as if we could simply quantify learning in some concrete form. Learning becomes reified in such a way that some "*get it*" while others do not. They assume putative starting points from which those individuals who do not distance themselves are labeled "*sub-normal*". These types of theories contribute to certain discourses wherein individuals primarily from *nondominant* groups are classified as *disabled* and responsible for their condition (Gutierrez, 2008, p. 148), (Lave, 1996, p. 149).

Considering the above, and reflecting upon the findings of their various research studies, Holland, Lave et al. have elaborated Social Practice Theory which incorporates *the study of persons, local practice and long term, historically institutionalized struggles*. The theory explores the *historical productions of persons in practice, and pays particular attention to differences among participants and to the ongoing struggles that develop across activities around those differences* (Holland & Lave, 2009, p. 1).

3.4 Social Practice Theory and School

Social Practice Theory represents a major contribution to sociocultural perspectives on learning identity, and community. It emphasizes the situated character of learning and the interconnectedness of community, practice, meaning, learning and identity (Lave 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger 1999).

However, what can be the connection between apprenticeship learning and school? In the words of J. Lave (Lave, 1996, p. 150):

The argument developed by Etienne Wenger and myself (Lave & Wenger, 1991) is that learning is an aspect of changing participation in changing “communities of practice” everywhere. Wherever people engage for substantial periods of time, day by day, in doing things in which their ongoing activities are interdependent, learning is part of their changing participation in changing practices. This characterization fits schools as well as tailor shops. There are not distinguishable “modes” of learning, from this perspective, because however educational enterprises differ, learning is a facet of the communities of practice of which they are compose.

Over the years Social Practice Theory has become an important framework for conceptualizing learning in a large body of contexts including the development of professional and vocational communities, non-institutional learning networks and also more generally in organizational and educational theory (Boylan, 2005).

Additionally, Social Practice Theory has also become instrumental in analyzing formal learning contexts such as schooling. This should not cause surprise since Social Practice Theory as the quote above attests, purports to be a general theory about learning.

Accordingly, in the last several years a body of researchers has applied the analytical concepts of the theory to interpret particular types of classrooms as communities of practice (Boaler, William & Zevenbergen, 2000; Boylan, 2005; Vågan, 2011). According to this perspective interaction and participation in school practices affords the construction of identities and knowledge about the practice, simultaneously. Learning, therefore, implicates a process of identity development. A student not only acquires skills and knowledge, but also becomes a certain type of learner in a particular community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). ...*Knowledge and identity constitute each other at the time of learning, as opposed to traditional accounts that distinguish between the two* (Vågan, 2011, p. 43). Learning is seen as active processes of legitimate engagement in collaborative knowledge production.

The student then belongs *to a more complex community of practice, one in which he or she gradually gains access. The situated view of learning argues that individualistic approaches fail to consider the ways in which the meanings of reflection and learning are socially rather than individually derived, and how individuals' learning experiences not only occur in social contexts but also are shaped by them. Learning trajectories are as much adaptive social processes as they are cognitive assimilation processes* (Vågan, 2011, p. 44).

At this point it is important to reframe the idea that a “classroom” should be located between four walls. What is fundamental is to reflect about what the crucial elements in a “classroom” are: a group of students and a teacher, concepts to learn and experiences to be shared. In addition, students and teachers meet on a regular basis at specific times, a curriculum is usually the guiding document of the teaching activities, and there are expectations that the students will be learning or developing competencies that are simultaneously individual, academic and socially endorsed. Accordingly, the activities conducted in nature are part of the school day despite the fact that they do not take place inside a classroom.

3.4.1 An Outline of the Theory

Social Practice Theory affirms that learning is best understood as not only arising from, but as being participation in social practices. These socially and culturally warranted practices are located in particular contexts and are legitimated by those individuals who participate in and are crucial in developing them.

Learning is described as a process of evolving participation from the newcomer's peripheral engagement in a particular practice all the way to the full participation of an old timer or a “master”. The term used by Lave and Wenger is *legitimate peripheral participation* indicating that the engagement must be socially legitimized by veteran practitioners and, additionally, that there are degrees of participation according to increased ability in the objective of the practice. Thus, a student who has never been on a field trip before may initially limit herself to a “peripheral” type of participation such as just trying to keep up with the group without much autonomy or initiative of her own. In time, however, that student will probably become more familiarized with the activities in nature. The student will then begin to recognize

certain animals and plants, certain types of soil and landscapes until, eventually, she will be in a position to take such field trips alone or encourage her family to make excursions in nature. Wenger identifies three essential dimensions through which a practice defines a community: mutual engagement, joint enterprise and a shared repertoire.

Mutual engagement is an essential characteristic of a community of practice. Although the members do not always have to be in harmonious agreement with each other or as Wenger puts it: Peace, happiness and harmony are therefore not necessarily properties of a community of practice (Wenger, 1999, p. 77). What they do need is to have the mutual engagement in the objective of the practice. The objectives are not necessarily the same all the time. They can change with each day of the practice; the group (community), however, is invested in the objective of a particular field trip such as for example how to recognize tadpoles.

Joint enterprise does not require homogeneity but to have dilemmas in common and their responses to their conditions, similar or dissimilar, are interconnected because they are engaged together in the joint enterprise of being students in a certain community of school practices in nature (Wenger, 1999, p. 79).

Wenger explains that the shared repertoire of a community of practice consists of words, gestures, ways of doing certain things, stories, actions or ideas that have been produced by the community in the course of its existence and have become integrated in the practice (Wenger, 1999, p. 83).

Moreover, Social Practice Theory states that a fundamental aspect of participation in a community of practice is the creation and development of a social identity associated with the type of practice. In other words, in the process of learning to do, participants also learn to be. According to Lave and Wenger learning and education are an identity project. Thus, according to Social Practice Theory, in the process of participating in school-practices-in-nature, students also learn to be the kinds of persons whose identities have a “familiarity with nature component”, in other words, a *Norwegianess* component.

As we have seen, according to Lave & Wenger identity and practice are deeply connected. The development of a practice requires the formation of a community whose participants relate to each other as co-participants. The practice involves the negotiation of who they are in that context. He states that the negotiation may be a silent one. Thus, the participants may not

address the issue directly. Regardless of the way the question of identity is dealt with, it is in the way community members engage in action and relate to each other that the negotiation of identities manifests itself (Wenger, 1999, p. 149).

In his research in the various communities of practice, Wenger observes that (figurative) identities are created that indicate “who one is” in the practice. In addition, (positional) identities of the type who is good at what, who knows what, who is funny, who is friendly, who is serious, who is responsible and so on are also present (Wenger, 1999, p. 149). The same is true in classrooms: *the teacher(s) and children in a class all know the ones who always go on field trips, the ones who never do, the one who is good at climbing and the one who is a good athlete but may not necessarily have the best balance when hiking in the forest.*

But the concept of identity is more than a self-image. The reason we often confuse identity with self- image according to Wenger is that we often talk about each other and think about each other using descriptive terms or “words”. Despite the importance of these words, they do not cover the complete spectrum of our lived experience of engagement in practice (Wenger 1999, p. 151). He describes identity to be in addition to all of the above, an interweaving of participation and objectification by which our experience and its social interpretation inform each other (Wenger, 1999, p. 151).

3.4.2 Limitations of Social Practice Theory

Despite its positive aspects, the situated view of learning does not deal with crucial issues regarding the conceptualization and analysis of people’s participation in social contexts and the identities produced in and through such participation (Vågen, 2011, p. 44). The situated view of learning uses a generalized notion of shared social structure that antecedes activity and people are supposed to act according to those structures. Thus it does not capture the different types of positioning that actors can take in a certain community. There are multiple possibilities for different types of identifications and identities in the time-space between a student’s introduction to the practice until he or she concludes the practice. In addition, Lave & Wenger’s situated approach does not explain satisfactorily enough the role of artifacts as mediators in identity development and learning contexts.

Because of the limitations of the situated view, it is necessary to include a positioning view as well as a sociocultural perspective on identity formation which will inform us the ways in which the incorporation of artifacts provides people with tools of agency and identity; how artifacts mediate, expand and limit action; and how they work as tools for individual's identities in cultural worlds (Vågan, 2011, p. 45, my translation).

The theory devised by Holland, Lachicotte, Cain and Skinner (2001), represents an integration of both approaches in a sociocultural theoretical framework of identity development. Furthermore, the utilization of this framework will help us understand how parents and teachers traverse through different contexts and formulate understandings of themselves and their children/students.

3.5 Figured Worlds

Holland et al. explain that *figured worlds* are historical occurrences to which people are enlisted and into which they enter, and those figured worlds themselves exist and develop through the participation and performances of their members (Holland et al., 2001). In addition, *figured worlds* are social phenomena where the positions of those who participate are relevant. It is possible that we may never enter some *figured worlds* because of cultural differences, skills, social position and many other factors. Holland et al. (2001) state:

Figured worlds are socially organized and reproduced; they are like activities in the usual, institutional sense. They divide and relate participants (almost as roles), and they depend upon the interaction and intersubjectivity for perpetuation. The significance of cultural worlds [figured worlds] in our lives does not derive from holding them in mind as some whole image (we may or may not do this), but from re-creating them by work with others.

From the above it is clear that figured worlds are a phenomenon that occurs within a certain culture (in our case, the Norwegian culture) or cultural setting (in our example, a public school), but their existence depends on the subjective participation and interaction among their members (in this instance the teachers, school personnel, students, parents and all those involved in nature-related activities). It is interesting to observe (this issue will be analyzed further when we discuss *positional identities*), that participants in figured worlds are divided in groups or categories according to the type of participation they put forth.

Holland et al. use Vygotsky's ideas of how socially created signs and symbols could serve as a means through which children's mental and emotional capacities could be culturally developed (Holland et al., 2001, p. 50). Vygotsky paid particular attention to the way certain object, named a pivot, was given a special meaning during play and was used as a mediating device to push the child into the imaginary world. Any object can serve as a pivot, for example, a rock or a table can be assigned *roles* as a house and a mountain, respectively. It is also possible that the concrete pivot may be discarded and children may enter the imaginary world without it. Despite the fact that children's play becomes more complex as they get older, their play still involves switching to an imaginary world beyond their real context and they become actors who behave according to its rules (Holland et al., 2001, p. 50). According to Holland et al., it is this special ability that makes human institutions or figured worlds possible. Thus, figured worlds can include academia, fashion, different kinds of sports, games, films, *Norwegianess* and a multitude of other possibilities.

Holland et al. describe *figured worlds* as a socially and culturally constructed *realm of interpretation* in which certain elements and participants are recognized. Importance is given to specific actions, and some performances are assigned more value than others (Holland et al., 2001, p. 52). Each *figured world* is a kind of micro cosmos, inhabited by a group of agents who perform certain actions (climbing mountains, jumping from a ski ramp, going camping in sub zero temperatures) deemed important in that *figured world* as if motivated and triggered by particular impulses (being *the first, the toughest, the strongest*, "becoming" *Norwegian*).

Figured worlds are social-historical constructions that frame interpretations, trigger certain behaviors, inhibit others and guide participants' points of view. Continual participation over time fosters a capacity to taste, touch, see, hear and feel the figured world (Holland et al., 2001, p. 52). In other words, the nature-related side of Norwegianess that we are studying in this thesis becomes experienced (felt) through the senses with time and practice. In addition, a figured world is shaped and re-shaped by the daily activities and events that contribute to its existence or, putting it differently, by the practices that give it life.

3.5.1 Positional Identities

Holland et al. make a distinction between what they call Figurative Identity and Positional Identity (Holland et al., 2001, p. 125). Both are two facets of a person's lived identity.

Figurative or Narrativized Identity has to do with stories, acts, and characters that make the world a cultural world (Holland et al., 2001, p. 127). Positional identities have to do with a person's position regarding another in the same figured world. They explain the concept as follows:

Positional Identity is connected to one's sense of social place and entitlement, social affiliation and distance from the social-relational structures of the lived world. Positional Identities are related to a person's limited or unlimited access to certain activities, cultural practices, and through those practices a sense of power or no power at all (Holland et al., 2001, p. 125, p. 127).

These two facets of lived identities are interrelated in a variety of ways. They explain that there are times when they coincide with one another but there are times when one dominates over the other (Holland et al., 2001, p. 125). In my view, positional identities are always a part of figured worlds even if their existence is not object of open discussion. In Chapters 5 and 6 we will examine the importance of the concepts of positional and figurative identities for school practice. In addition, we will apply this concept for the investigation of some of the data we have gathered for this study.

The statement below has special importance for this research study of school practices in nature:

Spaces, too, imbue and are imbued by the kinds of persons who frequent them; conventional forms of activity likewise become impersonated. The dialect we speak, the degree of formality we adopt in our speech, the deeds we do, the places we go, the emotions we express, and the clothes we wear are treated as indicators of claims to and identification with social categories and positions of privilege relative to those with whom we are interacting (Holland et al., 2001, p. 127).

Since, according to the quote above, in a particular figured world we position ourselves in whatever we do, it is reasonable to conceive that positional identities occur as a result of a person's use of a certain type of space, such as nature, in the figured world of Norwegianess-in-School. The way a child utilizes nature in that figured world determines the type of positional identity she might have. Moreover, it is not just the use of space that may trigger positional identities, but also the artifacts that are utilized by the participants (types of clothes and shoes, different kinds of tools) and the types of actions in the figured world. In other words, the way an action is performed may acquire a meaning that may lead to a positional identity being assigned to a person in a certain figured world.

Moreover, positional identities and the artifacts associated with them may be specific to a figured world or they may span across different figured worlds; for example a good college handball player can also be recognized as a good athlete in the world of national sports. In addition, certain clothes and artifacts that are traditional in a particular figured world may be inappropriate or give rise to claims of undesired positional identities in a different figured world.

3.5.2 Daily Activities and Positionality

Holland et al. point out that in any group engaged in jointly creating and participating in a figured world, daily activities position the participants situationally, relative to each other. That means that participants in collaborative activities—be they staff members at a public school creating an activities calendar for a group of students, veteran teachers welcoming a new teacher to a staff meeting, or a group of students going on a field trip, all those individuals participate in interactions and conversations that will invariably lead to the construction of social positions and social relations with each other. Cultural artifacts in the form of cultural discourses or “local discourses” utilized in daily practices construct subjects and subject positions. These positions are at least temporarily assigned to individuals in a certain context (Holland et al., 2001, p. 133).

Social positions can become dispositions through participation, identification and knowledge of the discourse within a certain figured world (Holland et al., 2001, p. 136). Holland et al.’s concept of discursive positioning as that which occurs as a result of the cultural artifacts of discourse also leaves room for dissidence. In other words, there are individuals who may be assigned certain positions but refuse to identify with them. Even though I concur with Holland et al., I argue that in the case of children, the issue of “dissidence” becomes much more complex since it may involve struggles against social positioning that span over many figured worlds as it happens with ethnicity, gender and social class.

Positional identities develop over time. It is possible that children and newcomers to a particular figured world manifest a disposition to a certain relational (positional) identity. Holland et al. explain that Vygotsky’s concept of semiotic mediation can be used to explain

how these dispositions can be countered or rejected (Holland et al., 2001, p. 137). The progression from social position to positional identity, into a disposition to voice opinions or to silence oneself, to participate or withdraw, according to the social context, happens with time and the development of social interaction.

Children and newcomers arriving at a particular figured world acquire positional dispositions and identities. At some point after their initial entrance into the figured world, they may learn how their claims will be received by the members of the group. Hence, the preliminary stage to a positional identity for participants is a group of dispositions concerning what they can say, where they can go, what kind of privileges or limitations they have and even what type of emotion they can display; in summary, what they are allowed to do or not in that figured world (Holland et al., 2001, p. 143). Thus, it is particularly important for children to be cognizant of the rules of the game in the figured worlds they enter because the “local” discourse in a certain figured world may be quite different from the official discourse of the institution they attend.

3.5.3 The Space for Authoring Selves

It is fundamental to understand that the process of identity formation is quite complex; there is no automatic stamping of identities from the collective upon individuals in a certain figured world. Identities are ever forming in the words of Holland et al. (Holland et al., 2001, p. 169). Thus, identities can be formed, rejected or transformed in a certain figured world.

At this point it is useful to refer to Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism utilized by Holland et al. as explained by Michael Holquist. Dialogism is itself a kind of ubiquitous figured world wherein sentient beings always exist in a state of being “addressed” and in the process of “answering” (Holland et al., 2001, p. 169). So it is as if all participants in a cultural world were immersed in a dialogic “reality” with all participants being “addressed and in the process of “responding” to stimuli or “messages”. Some of those messages come in the form of language, others as social codes, and others as physiological stimuli. As long as someone is in a certain location, he or she must react to those stimuli either by ignoring them or creating a

response that takes the form of making sense, of producing meaning out of such utterances (Holquist, 1990, p. 47; Holland et al., 2001, p. 170)

Therefore when we create “meaning” from some among the infinitude of stimuli we are subjected to, so this “meaning” becomes “our” meaning to which we will respond. In the words of Holland et al., when we construct “meaning”, we “author” the world. However the “I” draws upon the languages, the dialects, the words of others, to which she has been exposed. An important reminder issued by Holland is that languages are... not only abstract semiotic systems but inevitably and inextricably also ideological and lived perspectives on the world (Holland et al., 2001, p. 170). Thus, a common saying in Norway that “a (Norwegian) child is born with skis on her feet”, represents more than an innocent statement on the commonness of skiing, it tells the listener among other things about the importance of being outside, of exercising one’s body from an early age, of the need to have the (right) artifact to do that, and about the importance of sports in the Norwegian culture.

Since Identity is always dialogical when we express, listen and speak, it is fundamental to consider the importance of assisting youngsters in making meaning of the figured world they have become a part of.

The job of responding to others is very significant. According to Holland& al., we are always in a situation where we have to answer to others in our environment, thus the importance of space of authoring must always be taken into consideration. They remind us that it is highly unlikely for the process of identity formation to ever be concluded. According to the dialogical perspective there is no room for doubt that a person’s identity will always be dependent upon her social and environmental conditions. If those conditions should change, so the new answer required may be different from the old one. Thus it is particularly important for non-ethnic-Norwegian children and their families to be given special support with regards to the commonness of Norwegian practices in nature since most probably they represent a change in their environmental situation. We will discuss this issue in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Holland focuses on Vygotsky’s emphasis on the importance of the social. In doing that, they use Lave and Wenger’s (1991) term and affirm that learning is situated. My view is that the term “situated” is particularly appropriate since the cultural elements that may become part of an individual’s repertoire are in large part dependent on his or her location, gender, social

position and several other cultural elements from which she collects her repertoire of responses and interacts with others in activities. In addition, other members of the group will encourage some forms of expression and discourage others. For example, students at a Norwegian elementary school may be encouraged by other group members to go outside when it rains; by the same token, pupils may hear that this is the way Norwegians behave and so on. In addition, they may also be discouraged from staying inside in subzero weather with utterances such as “there is no bad weather, just bad clothes”.

3.5.4 The importance of the community

Holland et al. alert us for the fact that it should not be assumed that all participants in a figured world will automatically develop an identity relative to that figured world. For example, some of the participants in the figured world of Norwegians-in-nature may not be sufficiently supported by the social context and hence perhaps not ever develop a Norwegian-in-nature identity. This possibility will be further discussed in Chapter 8.

At this point it is useful to consider the concept of space of authoring which represents a territory of ample possibilities where social languages meet, imbued with the potencies of power, position, and privilege. Holland et al. (2001, p. 19) explain that such a concept is necessary in order to understand the positions we occupy and in order to achieve an understanding of authorship and of social and personal agency. In my view such a concept should be kept in mind, especially when we deal with non-ethnic-Norwegian children. In our case of study, it may be the first time some non-ethnic-Norwegian children enter the figured world of Norwegians-in-nature, as part of school practice. More will be said about these concepts in Chapter 7.

3.5.5 Lived Worlds, Figured Worlds and Relational Identities

It is true that a child has a school identity that takes shape among the figured and relational identifications that occur inside the space of his or her school activity. In particular, regarding school practices in nature connected to the figured world of Norwegians-in nature, my interest lies in the kind of identifications that will be observed by parents and teachers as a result of

those nature practices. We must bear in mind that all forms of expression will have their valences within the figured world of Norwegians-in-nature: styles of dress, ways of behaving in nature, familiarity with certain plants and animals – all are socially learned characteristics that have both figurative and positional value which tell the group about a student's affiliations, social category and relational position (Holland et al., 2001, p. 235).

All the concepts we have seen so far have practical usefulness and constitute a small lexicon of terms that help classify particular types of school experiences more precisely. It is my view that they can be utilized in ways that assist both teachers and researchers in describing categories, attitudes, behaviors and activities that are a part of Norwegian school practice.

3.6 Artifacts (Cultural Tools)

The word “artifact for many people may invoke the idea of a material object, an item that was manufactured by a human being. According to this point of view, artifacts are thought of as tools. However, I concur with Michael Cole who states that one misses the depth of the concept when one only thinks of artifacts merely as tools (Cole, 1998; p. 117). Here I follow M. Cole who defines an artifact as an aspect of the material world that has been modified over the history of its incorporation into goal- directed human action (Cole, 1998, p. 116).

Cole explains that because of the modifications brought about in the process of their creation and utilization, artifacts possess dual characteristics: they are concomitantly ideal (conceptual) and material. Artifacts are ideal because their material form has been shaped by their participation in the interactions of which they were previously a part and which they mediate in the present. Cole explains that these properties of artifacts are equally valid for all artifacts from chairs and plates which are material culture and extend even to language which Cole understands as a system of artifacts (Cole, 1998, p.357).

Cole expands Wartofsky's three level categorization for artifacts in a pertinent way to this investigation. In Wartofsky's view artifacts are objectifications of human needs and intentions already invested with cognitive and affective content (Wartofsky, 1973, p. 204). They can be primary, secondary or tertiary. Primary artifacts are the ones used directly in production such as hammers, axes, clothes, shoes, fishing rods. Cole's examples for this category are words,

writing instruments, telecommunication networks, and mythical cultural personages (Cole, 1998, p. 121).

Secondary artifacts include representations of primary artifacts and modes of action using primary artifacts (Cole, 1998). Cole explains that secondary artifacts are crucial in the transmission of cultural beliefs and traditions in addition to ways of acting and behaving. They include recipes, traditional beliefs, norms, constitutions, curricula, newspapers, documentary-type television programs and the like (Cole, 1998).

Tertiary artifacts are imaginary artifacts. They include art, free play or game activity. These types of artifacts do not have a representational role because they have become abstracted from their use in productive praxis and from their direct representational function (Susi, 2006). Examples of tertiary artifacts can be films, music, plays, romance novels and the like.

When we apply Cole's understanding of culture as a "system of artifacts" and "context as both that which surrounds and that which weaves together", the importance of artifacts in a cultural (figured) world becomes clear (Cole, 1998, p. 143). Artifacts are not only constituent elements of culture, they are also mediating elements within a figured world.

Artifacts are not only weaved into the fabric of cultural worlds, but they are also fundamental means of mediation, transformation and re-creation within a figured world.

However, in addition to the above, positionality is a natural occurrence in figured worlds and artifacts are utilized in important ways in determining this positionality. The type of artifact a person uses, the way an artifact is utilized, the degree of familiarity a person has with some artifacts are indices of positionality that may be utilized to assign positional identities in a figured world as we will see in Chapter 7.

These artifacts serve as mediational means that help establish positional identities.

Artifacts have a fundamental role in figured worlds. According to Holland et al. (2001) artifacts are the pivots in the Vygotskian sense. They represent *the means by which figured worlds are evoked, collectively developed, individually learned, and made socially and personally powerful* (Holland et al., 2001, p. 61). Thus artifacts possess a material and a symbolic dimension whose meaning depends on the figure world of which they are a part. That means that test results, IEP's (Individual Educational Plans), sneakers, backpacks, skis,

and progress reports, all of those have special meanings in the figured worlds where they belong. In addition, they have *developmental histories*. Their creation or production is associated to purposeful human activity (Holland et al., 2001, p. 61). Therefore they are crucial in human life because artifacts are responsible for framing and guiding the meaning attributed to certain activities and acts in a figured world. This discussion will be taken up in Chapter 8.

3.7 Conclusion

Holland et al. (2001, p. 287) affirm that “the sites of consciousness lie within a thoroughly social world”. They also stated that we cannot deny the “power of culture” in shaping our lived-world and our experiences therein. This chapter introduced the theoretical lenses through which I have looked at school-practices-in-nature and Norwegianess. The concepts included here, figured worlds, Social Practice Theory, communities of practice, cultural tools (artifacts), among others have helped sharpen my focus and deepen my understanding of the ways culture and social practices contextualize behavior, change it and assign meaning to it.

4 Methodology

This section of the study presents the methodological issues pertaining to this investigation in connection with the Research Questions and the theoretical foundations that have been established. In this chapter I will: introduce and expound my choice of a qualitative method of research (4.1); expound on the choice of the research interview as a knowledge producing instrument (4.2); discuss the knowledge gained from interviews (4.3); present the fifteen informants in this study (4.4); explain the interview analysis procedure (4.5); discuss the issues of validity and reliability connected to this study and show how they can be solved (4.6). Additionally, I will discuss reliability, validity, generalizability and the ethical issues related to this research study (4.6). Finally in that section I will also discuss ethical issues related to the research study and the role of the researcher.

4.1 Choice of Method

I chose my specific scientific approach based upon the characteristics of my study topic. Since one of my aims is to understand what opinions non-ethnic-Norwegian parents, teachers and ethnic-Norwegian parents have with regards to school-practices-in-nature, it was natural then to produce knowledge by seeking to listen to the voices of persons who have the topic under investigation as a direct part of their life-worlds. In that regard, it was relevant to choose a qualitative research approach and to interview parents and teachers who have children in the Norwegian public school system.

Qualitative research “involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 5). Qualitative researchers study phenomena in their natural settings, attempting to interpret them “in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). In other words, I am interested in creating knowledge with people who are directly involved in the topic of study.

A qualitative research approach emphasizes the social historical construction of reality, the close relationship between the investigator and the object of study and the contextual

constraints that frame the investigation. Denzin and Lincoln mention that qualitative “researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.14). Qualitative researchers are interested in answers that focus on the social interactions and on their meaning. Contrastingly, a quantitative approach would seek to uncover “causal relationships between variables, not processes” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.14). Flick explains the differences between the two approaches to research, explaining that the quantitative approach has been applied in order to isolate *causes and effects... operationalizing theoretical relations... (and) measuring and...quantifying phenomena... allowing the generalization of findings* (Flick, 2002, p. 3). He continues to state that:

Rapid social change and the resulting diversification of life worlds are increasingly confronting social researchers with new social contexts and perspectives... traditional deductive methodologies are failing ... thus research is increasingly forced to make use of inductive strategies instead of starting from theories and testing them...knowledge and practice are studied as local knowledge and practice.

It is clear that both qualitative and quantitative approaches have the objective of capturing their subject’s point of view; however, qualitative investigators “can get closer to the actor’s perspective through detailed interviewing and observation” (Flick, 2002, p.16). Considering that the purpose of this study is to elucidate parents’ and teachers’ *points of view regarding school-practices-in-nature* observations were not considered relevant. Therefore, this study concentrates on detailed, semi structured interviews.

4.2 Interview as Inquiry

Based on a qualitative research tradition, I have decided to produce knowledge through fifteen different research interviews at a public elementary school, and at the homes and offices of some parents in the Oslo and Bærum areas of Norway. The choice of school was made keeping in focus the research questions and in the best way to answer them. Furthermore, I have opted to follow a hermeneutical *paradigm* to interpret the interview text. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 50) “the purpose of hermeneutical interpretation is to obtain a valid and common understanding of the meaning of a text”. They add that “human beings are self-interpreting, historical creatures” who acquire their “means of understanding from tradition and historical life” (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 51). I concur with their statement that “every text derives its meaning from a con-text”. That is to say that there is no

escape from our social-historical circumstances; whatever our “texts” may be, they are always unequivocally linked to our unique personal history and time. But, as constrained as we might be, we are also co-creators of new texts and contribute to transform our time. According to Brinkmann and Kvale the hermeneutical paradigm teaches the researcher “to analyze their interviews as texts and look beyond the here and now of the interview situation... and pay attention to the contextual interpretive horizon provided by history and tradition” (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 51).

Considering the aim of this investigation, I have decided to conduct phenomenological life world interviews. According to Kvale and Brinkmann, a research interview distinguishes itself from an ordinary conversation in that there is a methodical awareness around the way of asking questions, there is a focus on the dynamics of the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee and a critical, probing stance to the resulting knowledge produced during the interview. The cited researchers explain that “in qualitative inquiry, phenomenology is a term that points to an interest in understanding social phenomena from the actors’ own perspectives and describing the world as experienced by the subjects, with the assumption that the important reality is what people perceive it to be” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 26). Through detailed semi structured interviews with ten parents and five teachers based on a carefully designed interview guide, I believe that I am in a position to interpret the experiences and reflections of the informants’ life words regarding the object of this study.

Kvale and Brinkmann explain that according to postmodern epistemology, knowledge is “less a matter of interaction with a nonhuman reality than a matter of conversation between persons” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 53). They continue to explain that in postmodern thought the interview is considered a “production site of knowledge”, taking into consideration “the differences between oral and written text, and emphasizes the narratives constructed in the interview “. Considering the interview as a locus of knowledge production, it is pertinent to describe here the seven characteristics of the knowledge produced in an interview. Knowledge gained from interviews is “produced, relational, conversational, contextual, linguistic, narrative and pragmatic” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 53).

4.3 Knowledge Gained from Interviews

According to Kvale and Brinkmann these features of interview knowledge are intertwined and are considered by them as a necessary starting point for elucidating the kind of knowledge produced “by the research interview and for developing its knowledge potential” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 53). It is important to note that the above characteristics are not only true for interview knowledge but are also basic features of the “lived social and historical world of human interaction” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 54). Kvale and Brinkman mention that the difference characteristics of knowledge that arrives out of an interview:

Knowledge as Produced: The research interview is an event where knowledge is produced. This knowledge is neither found nor given; it is actively developed in the interaction between researcher and informant and co-authored by them. The knowledge *production process continues through the transcription, analysis, and reporting of the original interviews, with the reported knowledge tinged by the procedures... applied along the way.*

Knowledge as Relational: *The knowledge produced in an interview is inter-relational and inter-subjective.* As it was mentioned before, it is co-authored by the interviewer and the interviewee (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 54).

Knowledge as Conversational: Based on the postmodern understanding about the nonexistence of an objective reality that can be measured and quantified according to positivist models, “attention must be paid to discourse and negotiation about the meaning of the lived world” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 54).

Knowledge as Contextual: Interview knowledge is contextual and not automatically transferable across settings. Therefore, it is necessary for the researcher to be especially attentive and provide “thick contextual descriptions of the settings” when “ethical judgments of an interview procedure” and... “generalization issues of the knowledge produced are being considered” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 55).

Knowledge as Linguistic: The research interview and its resulting “product is linguistic in the form of oral statements and transcribed texts to be analyzed” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 55).

Knowledge as Narrative: Interviews are a powerful means of eliciting narratives which assist us in understanding our own life worlds and our social historical circumstances (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 55).

Knowledge as Pragmatic: Brinkmann and Kvale state that nowadays the issue of “whether a study ...leads to true knowledge tends to be replaced by the pragmatic question of whether it provides useful knowledge”(Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 56). The idea of useful is value laden and will be discussed further in the Ethics part of this chapter.

4.4 Choice and Presentation of Informants

Concerning the choice of informants I have decided to conduct this qualitative investigation based on the data obtained from research interviews with fifteen different informants: three-ethnic-Norwegian parents, seven non-ethnic-Norwegian parents and five second grade Teachers from a multicultural elementary school in the Oslo area, “Solbakken School”. Since the objective of this investigation is to produce knowledge about parents’ and teachers’ opinions regarding the role of nature in Norwegian schools, it was reasonable to seek to speak to the parents and teachers themselves. In order to achieve access to those parents, I first contacted the Principal of a multicultural elementary school in Oslo, explained the idea of the project and asked for permission to interview all of the teachers (“kontaktlærere”) in a certain grade level. The Principal suggested second grade and asked that I send her an email with a brief description of the study. Once she read and approved the project’s description, the Principal spoke to the chosen Teachers herself to learn about their willingness to participate; after they showed an interest in the project, I received permission to introduce the project to the Teachers. A date was set for a first introductory meeting; no interviews were conducted that day. During the meeting, at the suggestion of the chosen Teachers, a letter with the Principal’s stamp of approval was sent via school mail to all the parents in second grade, describing the project and inviting them to participate. The information letter included a brief objective of the project, their rights as informants and general characteristics of the interview to be conducted. Out of the ones who responded, I chose the ten parents who would most likely best fulfill the requirements of this research project. Furthermore, it also seemed vital to

understand the general role of nature in the Norwegian curriculum, both in theory and in general school practice. Therefore I found it pertinent to study the written form of the elementary school curriculum, KL06 (Chapter 2). The interpretation of the curriculum in school-practice will be given by the teachers in Chapter 7. A brief description of each one of the informants is included below: The parents are:

Informant 1: “Thilini” from Sri-Lanka. She is in her mid-thirties and has two children: 11 and 4. Both children attend Solbakken School. She has been in Norway since 1998. Thilini attended one year of high school before moving to Norway. Her husband is also from Sri-Lanka.

Informant 2: “Shu” from China. She has lived in Norway since 2000. She is in her mid-thirties and has a University degree in Chinese and English. She has two children who are 8 and 4. Her husband is Norwegian.

Informants 3/4: “Najeeb” & “Amara” from Pakistan. They are a couple who were interviewed at the same time. Originally it was Amara who was supposed to be interviewed, but when I arrived at their house, it became clear that the husband wanted to participate; in fact, he answered most of the questions. Najeeb is in his mid-forties and Amara is in her early thirties. She has a master’s degree in Political Science and he attended high-school. Najeeb came to Norway in 1990 and Amara came in 2003. They have three children who are 4, 6 and 9.

Informant 5: “Amin” from Pakistan. He is Najeeb’s brother. His wife, “Ameria”, was also *partially* present during the interview. I say *partially* because in the beginning she served refreshments to me and her husband at her husband’s request. After that, she sat down in an armchair but hardly said a word. They have four children: 4, 8, 10 and 12. They are in their late thirties/ early forties.

Informant 6: “Sara” from Morocco. She is in her early forties and has lived in Norway for 25 years. Her husband is from Pakistan. They have four children 18, 16, 15 and 8.

Informant 7: “Fatima” from Pakistan. Although her parents come from Pakistan, Fatima was born and raised in Norway. She has three children: an 8 month old baby and two others who are 4 and 8 years old.

Informant 8: “Tone” from the West coast of Norway. She is finishing her Ph.D. studies and has two children who are 8 and 5. They have lived in Oslo for 6 years.

Informant 9: “Iselinn” from the West coast of Norway. She is 42 and has lived in Oslo since 1992. She has three children: 3, 5 and 8 years old. She has a master’s degree in management.

Informant 10: “Maja”, 29, from Oslo. She has two children 4 and 8. Their father is from Egypt. She is separated and works in a clothing shop. She did not attend college.

The teachers are:

Informant 11: “Vigdis” from Oslo. She has worked at Solbakken School for sixteen years and is “adjunktutdannet” (four years of university plus specialization in a subject, in her case, Math and special education). She has been a teacher for more than twenty five years.

Informant 12: “Thor” from Oslo who has worked as a teacher for twenty five years: thirteen years at another school and twelve at Solbakken School. He has lived in Oslo all his life and has always taught children in Elementary school.

Informant 13: “Sesilje” from Oslo. She has been a teacher for thirty two years, has taken extra classes in Science and is responsible for Science teaching at school. She has worked at Solbakken School for thirteen years.

Informant 14: “Tone” from Bergen. She has worked as a teacher since she finished her teacher’s education course in 1999. She has lived in Oslo for ten years and has worked at Solbakken School since she came to Oslo. She has specialization in Art.

Informant 15: “Sibel” from Oslo (Turkey). Sibel was born and raised in Oslo but her parents came from Turkey. She has just finished her teacher education course and this is her first year at Solbakken School.

4.5 Data Analysis

Through data analysis and interpretation, I have sought to interpret the meaning of the interview material. The large amount of data that occurs as a result of the interviews demands that choices are made with regards to which statements or excerpts should be presented in the study. Those choices were made taking into consideration the objectives of the investigation and how best to illuminate the research questions. As previously stated, the interpretation process in this study stems from the hermeneutical tradition. According to Kvale and Brinkmann, interpreting “the meaning of interview texts goes beyond a structuring of the manifest meanings of what is said to deeper and more critical interpretations of the text” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 207). Because it was the idea of this researcher to achieve comprehensive interpretations of meaning, care was taken to obtain detailed descriptions during the interviews; I also made sure that the questions posed were clear and elucidative; I searched for nuances, differences and perhaps contradictions. The emphasis is not on an absolute but on a relational concept of meaning. The interview texts were broken down into smaller parts according to the different themes covered, those small parts were then interpreted and “out of these interpretations the parts are again related to the totality and so on” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 210). It was always kept in mind throughout the analysis process that hermeneutics does not represent a set of pre-determined steps but it is instead, an overall questioning of the meaning of the interview text.

4.6 Reliability, Validity, and Generalizability of Interview Knowledge

Kvale and Brinkmann explain that many qualitative researchers have rebelled against the concepts of reliability, validity and generalization claiming that they originate from constraining positivist approaches and only serve to *hamper a creative and emancipatory qualitative research* (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 244). I concur with Brinkmann and Kvale that the terms *reliability* and *validity* are common concepts in everyday language; for instance the utterances: *Is this a reliable car? Your driver's license is not valid anymore* are just

examples of the use of those terms in ordinary language; in that sense, because these concepts are also part of social interactions and social practice, it is important to address them with regards to the knowledge produced in an interview.

4.6.1 Reliability

Reliability is connected to the *consistency and trustworthiness of research findings* (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 245). It is often associated with the replicability of the results, in other words, will informants change their answers in an interview study or will they provide different answers to different researchers. In the latter case, it is particularly important for the researcher to be aware of the use of leading questions, in the event that they are not part of the interview strategy, because leading questions can influence the kind of answer an informant gives. This researcher was especially careful when posing questions during the interviews to avoid using leading questions, even though at times it was necessary to pose follow up or clarifying type questions in order to understand what the informant meant. Another point of interest concerns transcriber's reliability; it is especially pertinent when interview texts are being transcribed by several persons. In this research study all the interviews were taped with a very good sound recorder, which in turn made the transcription work much less demanding. In addition, all interviewing was conducted by the author of this study, which minimized the chance for errors. Although it is undeniable that a good degree of reliability is a desirable feature in a research study in order to counterbalance inadvertent subjectivity, Brinkmann and Kvale alert against the excessive emphasis on reliability which *may counteract creative innovations and variability* (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 245).

4.6.2 Validity

In the social sciences the issue of validity addresses whether a piece of research studies what it intends to study. Brinkmann and Kvale stress the fact that validation does not pertain to a separate part of the research work. Validation should be woven into the whole research process. Validation is not a final product but a continuous process *throughout the stages of knowledge production* (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 249). Moreover, they have devised some useful ways weaving validation into each of their seven stages of the research process. This systematization was particularly useful in the present study because it included an

additional element of reflection to my research. What follows represents the validation issues applied to my project.

Validity in the Thematizing Stage: Effort was made to place this investigation upon solid theoretical ground with research questions that represent logical ramifications of the theory.

Validity in the Designing Stage: This researcher made sure the design and methods were appropriate to the purpose of the study; consequently, the knowledge produced has design validity.

Validity in the Interviewing Stage: Trustworthy subjects, a carefully planned interview guide aiming to elucidate the research questions, meticulous questioning in order to ascertain the meaning of interviewees' statements and continuous verifying of any ambiguous utterances were a way of providing validation in situ.

Validation in the Transcribing Stage: This researcher paid special attention to the nuances between oral and written language; all transcribing supervision and interviewing were conducted by the project designer who used a high quality sound recorder.

Validation in the Analysis Stage: The logic of interpretation of the interview text was well-grounded and the questions to the interview text were coherent.

Validating: This stage involves reflection as to the forms of validation that are best suited to the present study and deciding which community should be involved in a conversation on validity: in the present case, the education research community, elementary school teachers in the Oslo area, in addition to ethnic-Norwegians and non-ethnic-Norwegian parents.

Reporting: This stage entails the issue of the veracity of the research findings and the role of the readers in validating them; in the present case, potential readers could also be the informants directly involved in the study's knowledge production, and the communities named above.

Brinkmann and Kvale make an important point regarding the intricateness of validating qualitative research. This difficulty "need not be due to an inherent weakness in qualitative methods, but may on the contrary rest on their extraordinary power to picture and to question the complexities of the social realities investigated" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 25).

4.6.3 Generalizability

Brinkmann and Kvale explain that in postmodern thought the emphasis on universal truths and reverence to individuality gives way to an interest in *heterogeneity and contextuality of knowledge*; in other words, the focus is not on *generalizing* but on *contextualizing* (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 261). A common concern with regards to interview research seems to be that there are not enough subjects for generalizations to be drawn. Therefore the two authors ask: “Why generalize?” These demands for universal generalizations in the social sciences stem from positivist beliefs that all scientific knowledge should be universal and valid for everyone, forever. But according to pragmatist, constructionist and discursive views, social knowledge reflects socially and historically contextualized ways of comprehending and participating in the social world. It is necessary for the researcher to understand the kind of knowledge he or she is producing in order to ask the appropriate question which is not whether the knowledge produced can be universally valid, but whether the knowledge obtained in a particular interview context can be transferred to other relevant situations. In that regard those authors introduced the concept of *analytical generalization*. Analytical generalization entails a rational evaluation of the degree to which the knowledge obtained in one investigation may be utilized as a reference to evaluate what may occur in another circumstance. It is based on an analysis of the similarities and differences between two situations. They explain that researchers use assertational logic such as the legal form of argumentation in court and arguments based on theory. In that situation the researcher clearly explains his or her arguments for a possible generalization. Thus we can distinguish two modalities of analytical generalization: *researcher –based and reader-based analytical generalization for interview studies* (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 263). In the first modality it is the researcher who, based on detailed descriptions of the study poses *arguments about the generality of his or her findings*. The latter case refers to the reader who, analyzing the researcher’s meticulous descriptions of the interview project, evaluates whether the findings may be generalized to a new situation.

4.6.4 Ethical Issues

Ethical issues permeate the entire research project, not just the interview situation. I concur with Brinkmann and Kvale when they state that *interviewing is a social practice*; "...it is a specific form of knowledge seeking, which brings with it specific moral issues" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 309). Here we will discuss the important role of informed consent, confidentiality, consequences and the role of the researcher. Brinkman and Kvale have labeled the areas above *fields of uncertainty*, meaning that these are sensitive areas, which can present potential problems which should be continually addressed and reflected upon throughout an interview process. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that ethical rules or principles must always be understood contextually (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 69). That means that, in order to conduct ethical research, it is the researcher's job to continuously evaluate his or her own practical wisdom and look at the situation at hand rather than try to proceed automatically and follow universal, abstract rules.

4.6.5 Informed Consent

It entails giving information to the participants about the general purpose of the research project, the principal characteristics of the design and any eventual risks or benefits from taking part in the investigation. It also involves explaining to the potential informants that their participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw from the study at any point.

I have sent an *Informed Consent* letter (which the informants were required to sign before they were interviewed) following the guidelines described above to all the parents and teachers participating in this study. As previously explained, before contacting the teachers, I spoke to the Principal of the school and obtained verbal permission to use the school as my research site, but I was required to send an email to the Principal with a summarized description of the project before having permission to contact the teachers. (This process is described in more detail, earlier in this Chapter). Prior to the interview, the informants were also briefed about the fact that all information given during the investigation was to be kept anonymous and confidential; that is to say that only this researcher and her advisor, Ola Erstad, would have access to the interview material.

Confidentiality in a research project means that personal information that could identify participants will not be revealed. If an investigation includes the disclosing of data that can potentially be used to identify informants, they should agree beforehand that identifiable information be released. Concerning the present study, all informants have remained anonymous, their names have been changed and the name of the school has been replaced by a fictitious name. However, the location of the school, Oslo, that it is public and multicultural, and the Teacher's grade level, are facts.

4.6.6 Consequences

It is crucial to consider the potential consequences of a research study before, during and even after the investigation is conducted since much can occur during the research process that the researcher did not have the means to anticipate. It is the researcher's responsibility to consider the consequences of the study, not only in terms of the informants but also in terms of the groups they represent. The consequences of a qualitative study must be considered regarding possible harm to the participants as well benefits expected from their participation in the study. Brinkmann and Kvale explain that the "risk of harm to a participant should be the least possible" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 73). Concerning the present study, careful thought was given to any possible risks for those involved, including the school. As a result, no foreseeable risks could arise from the knowledge produced by the interviews but some potential positive consequences were envisioned and they will be discussed in Chapter 8, "Discussion in the Light of the Research Findings" section of this thesis.

4.7 The Role of the Researcher

Considering that in qualitative studies and, particularly in interview studies, the researcher is the principal tool of knowledge production, his or her role is of vital importance concerning the overall quality of the project and the knowledge produced. Ethically consistent behavior on the part of the researcher is "more than abstract ... knowledge and cognitive choices; it

involves the moral integrity of the researcher, his or her sensitivity and commitment to moral issues and action” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 74). In this particular study, meticulous attention was given to this aspect from the beginning phase of *Thematizing* throughout every other stage of the investigation, “Designing, Interviewing, Transcribing, Analyzing, Verifying and Reporting” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 102). Especially during the *Interviewing* phase of the project I had to be aware of the asymmetrical power relation between the researcher and the interviewees, where the investigator is *usually positioned as the relatively more powerful side* (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 76). In that regard, conducting pilot interviews was instrumental because this researcher was able, not only to become more familiarized with the interview as a research method, but also learn firsthand about issues of inter-subjectivity. As a result of the pilot interviews, the necessary adjustments in the actual interviews were made in order to avoid excessive distance or inappropriate co-option.

5 Non-Ethnic-Norwegian Parents

For the purpose of this analysis the interview data was divided into two groups: non- ethnic-Norwegian parents in Chapter 5, and ethnic-Norwegian parents in Chapter 6. The objective of this separation was to determine whether there were any differences between the two groups, better examine in which areas those differences appeared and the specific nature of the differences. The answers given by those parents were divided according to the topics listed below.

5.1 Communication between Schools and Families

This section illuminates some frequently overlooked aspects of the communication between Norwegian schools and non-ethnic-Norwegian families that are relevant for this research on school-practices-in-nature.

5.1.1 Introduction

All the informants agreed that the school sends information to parents on a weekly basis. This category is important because the nature of the communication between schools and families may be the cause of particular behaviors on the part of children and families. For example, decisions such as sending children to school in sports clothes and with additional food in their lunch boxes in case the class is going on a field trip, or have them wear special clothes in case of a celebration or a special occasion generally depend on communication between parents and teachers/schools. Being in tune with their classmates and school expectations is a well-known motivating factor for children and young people. The opposite is also true, when students feel that they do not fit in with the school's expectations they may feel demotivated.

5.1.2 Weekly Schedule, Lesson Plans and Parent Meetings

The answers from non-ethnic-Norwegian parents varied somewhat in terms of how satisfied they were with the information they got from school. Most parents appeared quite happy with the information they received. Fatima was one of the most satisfied with the information sent by the school. She explained that they had meetings or assemblies four times a year and the school also had an Internet page. She pointed out that she could read a lot there about what happened at school. She stated that she had frequent contact with the teacher in addition to regular meetings. Fatima stressed that she had all the information she needed and complimented the teachers—“*they are so clever*”. She added that if she had any concerns about her daughter, she would receive assistance from the teacher: “*I think they are very clever*”, she declared.

Fatima explained in conversation afterwards that the teachers were extremely helpful in trying to assist her in finding solutions for her daughter’s apparent lack of friends: “*they find many good solutions*”. Fatima stressed that even though she had a Pakistani background, she had grown up in Norway, attended school here and had friends who were “*the same*”. She stressed that she “*and her friends*” were happy with the amount of information they received from the school. Fatima used the pronoun “*we*” throughout the interview and the above explanation that her “*friends were also happy with the teachers*” could explain her choice of pronoun.

However, another parent, Shu, wanted more detailed information about what her son actually did at school, especially during the time he was outside. Here is what she said when I asked how she received information about what was happening at school:

Shu: *Maybe little actually, we really don’t get much information. We have two foreldresamtaler (individual meetings with the teacher), one to one with the teachers- and then we have twice a year, a group foreldremøte (group meeting with the teacher and parents), all the parents are in the classroom while the teachers tell about what they are doing in the classroom. So those are the information channels we have.*

When I asked her whether she received a weekly plan, she confirmed that she did. However she added:

Shu: *But what they really do, we don’t really know. Let’s say they have 8 -11 doing mathematics and then after the school finishes at 1:00, then he goes over to activity school. There they say very little about what they are doing. I think there is also every other week – they have outdoor school, uteskole, in the woods, in the nature nearby.*

During the interview Shu made it clear that she wanted to know more specific details about the activities themselves, not just what the topic being studied was. It appeared that she was more dissatisfied with the *after* school program even though Shu made no separation between school per se and the *after* school program. Among the non-ethnic-Norwegian parents, Shu was the one who seemed most dissatisfied with the quality of the information she received from school.

Another important point arose from the declarations from four of the parents, Najeeb, Amara, Amin and Sara who provided some extra insight about what happens with information from school among some immigrant families. Najeeb, Amara, Amin and Sara explained that they always read the school's weekly plan, and they were satisfied with the information they receive from school, but all of them emphasized that many parents are unable to read the plan. They also explained that in many non-ethnic- Norwegian cultures it is mostly the mother who is responsible for the education of the children because the father is usually busy working, often holding more than one job. Since, according to Najeeb, Amara, Amin and Sara many of them are unable to read the plan, then there are many families who are not informed about what their children are doing at school or whether there are any special activities planned on a particular day/week. This may explain in part why some immigrant children come to school unprepared for an activity that was listed in the weekly plan. All the parents who were interviewed confirmed that the information that comes from school is in Norwegian. All of them stated that they read the plan but they know many who do not. Najeeb, Amara, Amin and Sara appeared quite interested in informing me that many non-ethnic-Norwegian parents do not know what is happening at school. This fact may explain why some children may come unprepared for a field trip, why they wear the "wrong" kind of clothes for being outdoors, why they do not have extra food or drink. It may even explain why some of them do not come on field trips. Because even though the teachers or the school might have explained the importance of field trips, those parents did not have enough command of Norwegian to understand what was being conveyed to them. Another possibility could be that some parents have never been told the objective and significance of field trips because it was assumed that all the parents already knew.

5.2 Living in Norway

This section deals with some of the special challenges faced by immigrant families. The two areas of interest here are: the relationship between parents and schools and parents' reflections on school-practices-in-nature.

5.2.1 Introduction

Living in Norway implies adjusting to different types of weather and temperatures. It also means not shying away from cold and rain and being outside regardless of the weather. Six out of the seven interviewed parents were not born in Norway and moved here as young adults in their early twenties. In contrast, their children were born in Norway and attend schools where they participate in nature practices that are probably novelty to their parents. In this section I wanted to investigate non-ethnic-Norwegian parents' reflections about Norwegian school-practices-in nature.

5.2.2 Outside in All Kinds of Weather

Even though all of the parents in this group were in agreement that being outside is important and that children should experience being outdoors in all kinds of weather throughout the year, their opinions differed as far as what they thought the minimum temperature should be and how long children should be outside. Two of them, Amara and Najeeb, thought being outdoors should be *voluntary*. The majority left the decision up to the teachers. Shu had a strong opinion about the importance of being outdoors throughout the year. Even though Shu herself did not have many opportunities for being outdoors prior to coming to Norway, for her, being outside represents a real *necessity* as the excerpt below shows:

Ellie: *Does being outside in all kinds of weather agree with what schools should teach?*

Shu: *I think so. Yeah. When you sit in the office for a long day and don't go out, you don't have much energy – then you have some fresh air, if you go out you feel better! If you want to learn quickly, you have to go out – have some “veksling”. When you have change you will learn things better...*

Shu compared her own needs to the needs of the children. She states that in order to think more clearly, we all need to go outside. She clarified in conversation that it is the same for children and by *outside* she meant spending time in the outdoors, not just running out and back inside again. She stated that there is neither a special time of day nor a particular time of the year for being outside. She explained that by “*veksling, exchanging*” she meant that “*one gets something from being outside*” and that in order to learn, it is necessary to do it indoors and outdoors; moreover, *going out [doors]* helps one *learn in a better way*.

According to another parent, Sara, it was important for her children to have something *to do*, not necessarily how cold it was.

Sara: My kids are out whatever the weather, hot or cold. ... Sometimes in Morocco ...the oldest said he had nothing to do there. Here in Norway, they can go skiing and skating, but for example in Morocco - if there is no sun there is nothing to do.

Sara explained her point of view stating that despite the cold weather, her sons had more options of what to do in Norway than in Morocco. She used the examples of skiing or ice skating as possible activities for them in Norway. She further clarified her view with a saying all Norwegians are familiar with: ... *It is also like ... some Norwegians say - there is no bad weather, it's just bad clothing!* In other words, if one had the right clothes then, in Sara's opinion, it was possible to be outdoors throughout the whole year.

Another parent, Fatima, of Pakistani background, born and raised in Oslo, shared the same view as Sara but she supported her opinion that it was good for children to be outside, in a special way. Here is what she said when I asked her opinion about children being outside regardless of the weather:

Fatima: They're supposed to start working one day, and then they cannot take the day off just because it's raining. It is very good that they do not look at the weather... there are all the possible clothes that they can use, so it should be no problem.

Fatima explained that being outside regardless of the weather could also prepare the children for their future work life. She stated that in the future when it rains, they (the children) could not simply consider “now I have to be inside”. In Fatima's opinion, children should not stop what they were doing or change plans because of rain or cold. Her view seemed to be that the practice of being outside in all kinds of weather taught the students how to get used to natural climatic changes. Later, the children would have a good chance of becoming more resilient grown-ups who would not allow ordinary natural phenomena to have any impact on their

responsibilities as adults. Fatima appeared not to have a definite limit for what the temperature should be for being outside. According to her, as long as the sun was shining and it was not windy, her children could play outdoors even with a temperature as low as -25. In addition, Fatima declared that she went on outings with her children, unlike her own mother who did not take her on outdoor expeditions when she was a child.

Fatima, Thilini, Sara and Amin made it clear that they trusted the teachers' judgment in deciding when and for long their children should be outdoors.

5.2.3 Learning in Nature

All non-ethnic-Norwegian parents agreed that being outdoors was positive and stated that their children learned a lot in nature. All the parents stated that participation in school-practices-in-nature enabled their children to acquire more knowledge about nature and living in Norway than they would have been able to provide themselves. Shu was the only non-ethnic-Norwegian parent who reported taking her children on additional nature activities outside of school. Amin's statement below explaining that his children did not go skiing with their family but they went skiing with the school illustrates a typical situation in the non-ethnic- Norwegian families I spoke with.

Amin: The children usually do not go privately (outside of school) – there, are we (their family) a little bad (laughs). But when they are at school they do it.

Another parent, Fatima, supported the fact that her daughter went hiking with the school because it was not so much in the Pakistani culture to do it.

Fatima: They learn very much because we Pakistanis do not hike much in nature ... so my opinion is that the kids have to go on tour while they are at school.

Fatima confirmed how much her daughter has learned from being outside: *she has learned to fish, she has learned the names of different animals and berries* among other things. In addition, she stressed that her daughter never complained about the excursions she participated in and stated that her child really enjoyed those outings. Fatima explained that she learned about the importance of these outings from having been raised in Norway because in Pakistan people did not have the habit of going on outdoor excursions.

Fatima: *When ... she is on a fishing trip, she learns the names of animals - she is very interested... Just at that age, children learn very quickly, so she is happy. When my little girl comes home, she never complains that it was a boring, bad excursion. I have never heard words like that. She enjoys the tours.*

Fatima's statement above was supplemented by all the other parents who gave additional examples of what they considered their children had learned during participation in school-practices-in nature. Among those were patience, when catching a fish, the names of twenty-three different birds and how to hold a fishing rod.

Sara: *... (He went) with the class on a trip. Then there were many things that they learned. How to use the fishing rod and he thought that he would throw it in the water and so the fish would come immediately. (He learned)... that one must be patient to get a fish ...*

Half of the parents stated that when children were outdoors in nature they could see, touch, smell, in other words, they could use their senses to get to know first-hand the concepts and the themes they were studying. According to all the parents, practice helped children remember better.

Amin: *... (They) go and look in the forest –(and find) what you are talking about...it's not enough to just read...it's better to have practice...one can go out there and show them things, most of the concepts (are in nature); people remember best practice...only reading the theory is not enough. Remembering theory is difficult...kids see those things in practice also learn more. They experiment...*

Shu pointed out that *variety; different activities and fun* were important elements that contributed to a positive learning experience for children. She explained that children had all of the above in nature. She stated that in nature they learned not only about different plants and animals but also how *be* in nature. According to Shu, fun was the extra bonus from being in the outdoors: *children learn without knowing.*

Shu: *The most important is that they are not just doing one thing; they have access to different things in nature and learn how to deal with nature... different plants... It will make things more interesting if you put it in nature. The children will learn without knowing.*

Six of the seven non-ethnic-Norwegian parents stated that their children knew more than other contemporaries in their countries of origin. Only one of the mothers was not sure because she did not know anyone of the same age as her son.

Najeeb: *I think they have more knowledge of nature than the kids in Pakistan because they know the environment. In Pakistan there are other problems the people are focused on.*

Amara: *They have much more knowledge than the children have in Pakistan, they learn so much from the school and now it's my life (laughs). I live my life.*

Amara appeared content with how much knowledge her child demonstrated and also with her own new life in Oslo. She stated that she continually learned about nature together with her children. In conversation Amara blurted out that in Norway “*all life matters even a dog or a cat*”. Her husband confessed that although he did not have much knowledge about the environment, he checked on the Internet if his daughter should ask him a question he did not know. Most parents confessed that their children had more knowledge about the environment than they did and that they (parents) were often corrected by their own children when they said something incorrect about the environment.

5.2.4 Obstacles to Participation

In this section I investigate the opinions and observations of parents about the kinds of hindrances that may prevent children from participating in nature activities. Initially, I will analyze “Cultural Differences”; afterwards I will discuss Obstacles to Participation in School-Practices-in-Nature. In addition to this section, this topic will be further discussed in Chapter 7, Teachers’ Voice, since it was also a concern among all of the teachers.

All of the non-ethnic-Norwegian parents agreed that there were always some children who did not participate in school excursions regardless of destination. That means that every time there is a field trip, there will probably be students who will not participate.

A) Cultural Differences

As all non-ethnic-Norwegian parents explained, despite the fact that they were aware of the positive benefits of excursions in nature, many had problems in taking their children on nature outings. These difficulties were due to several factors such as lack of time, other children, work and even, “not knowing what to do in nature”. As an example, Fatima explained that with three small children it might be difficult for her to have time to go for outings in nature. However, because her daughter had the opportunity to participate in school-practices-in nature, the child did not miss out on the learning that took place.

Fatima: To be completely honest, we (parents) do not have so much time to go hiking in the woods and stuff. It is often difficult. We take them, but it is very rarely. But it is very good that they go on trips with the school.

Although all the parents expressed that they were aware of the benefits of being in nature for their children, five out of the seven informants confessed that it was not part of their cultures to spend time in nature so they did not take their children on nature expeditions.

Amara: That is the problem, we are from Pakistan and we are not used to going in the forest and I don't teach my children to go in the forest.

Najeeb: And another reason is also we have a different culture and sometimes we have free time –religious holidays – so we are with friends and families instead of going out on mountain. The people are social so they want to meet each other. So we culturally make food and have fun.

In addition to the reasons enumerated above, Najeeb and five other parents explained that families have a tradition of visiting each other when they have free time. It seemed that those visits and the time families spend together happen mostly indoors.

B) Parents do not Understand the Purpose of the Trips

Although all the informants stressed that their sons and daughters always participate on school trips, all of them knew several other parents who did not allow their children to participate. Six out of the seven non-ethnic-Norwegian parents narrate episodes that sounded like Sara's:

Sara: I do not know if parents like that - I had two children who (attend this school)... The school organized (a trip) and they would be out in the winter for two or three days. There were many parents who denied that their children participated. Maybe they thought it was cold, maybe they were afraid they would be away from the family for too long.

Many parents who are unaccustomed to the safety of Norwegian forests may think that it may be dangerous to be outdoors. It is a fact that in many countries, being in nature may expose a person to many perils such as dangerous animals, poisonous insects or plants, pollution and even criminality. However, such is not the case in Norway but school administration and teachers should not assume that every parent has that knowledge.

Sara and five others explained that many parents had no idea about the objective of nature excursions and did not know that they were a part of school practice.

Amin: Perhaps some parents think that they cannot learn outdoors, studying is just inside a classroom. They're going on tour today, what should they do then? They are going on tour, so parents say then you can be home.

The majority of the parents stated that they knew other parents who had the opinion that learning only took place inside the classroom. Those other parents thought that no learning took place in school trips, therefore they did not appear to be aware of the importance of participation in activities outdoors. Amin and the others stressed that they knew the importance of field trips, especially going to the forest so their children always participated.

Amin: When they go on tour they think in a new way with the class and teacher.

Amin repeated several times that being on an excursion outdoors helped both teachers and students think differently. When I asked him to explain further, he stated that sometimes a student was not so clever in the classroom but was very good at climbing, running and doing practical things outdoors so the child had a chance to show the teacher another side of herself and the teacher might see some of that student's unknown traits.

C) Parents Cannot Read Information in Norwegian

The informants unanimously agreed that they receive information from school about their children's schedule on a weekly basis. However, those parents stressed that all the information is in Norwegian. In that regard, the informants pointed out that there is a large of parents (especially mothers), who cannot read Norwegian. Every interviewed parent knew several others who could not understand information written in Norwegian. They explained that it did not mean that they cannot *speak* the language, only that they cannot *read* Norwegian.

Najeeb: *Many of the women from Pakistan cannot read Norwegian. I think – because most mothers look after the kids – and mostly they cannot speak Norwegian (well), the father is outside working, maybe night shift and sleeping and mother she don't understand Norwegian so she hangs it on the kitchen, but is not going through (laughs).*

The narrative above describes a rather common situation among some immigrant families: father is out working all day and mother stays at home and takes care of the children. If there is something from school that she does not understand, the paper will be placed somewhere so father can read it. According to what some informants explained in conversation, sometimes the paper is read when he gets home; most of the time it is not read at all, either because Dad cannot read Norwegian so well or in some instances because neither father nor mother can read as explained in the excerpt below.

Sara: *I go all the time and read the mail - many of his (my son's) friends' mothers have not been to school, do not know what happens. They can't read Norwegian. They have not been in school in Morocco either! My brother has not been in school here in Norway - he was married to a Norwegian and it was okay (because she could read Norwegian). But there are some that come directly from the village, they cannot read and write - it's just the kids who can -.*

Even though most of the informants knew some who had not been to school in their native countries, the majority of those interviewed explained that many families could be helped if the information was sent in a language they could understand. The majority of the parents in this study were from Pakistan so it was Urdu that was considered a language most of them would be able to understand.

D) Inappropriate Clothing

It was unanimously agreed by parents and teachers that many children come to school and, especially, to outdoor excursions wearing inappropriate clothes. Student's participation in school-practices-in-nature is greatly hindered when they wear inadequate clothing as will be seen in Chapters 7, "Teachers' Voice", and the following Chapter, "Discussion in the Light of the Research Findings". In this section I will focus on parents' opinions about the topic.

Najeeb summarizes the opinions of the other parents who state that there are two main reasons why children wear inappropriate clothes and shoes.

Najeeb: *I think there are two reasons; they don't read information (from school) in advance, and the second may be that the children don't have these clothes, they are expensive also, and some parents don't have the money ...*

The first reason named by Najeeb, *why parents do not read the information from school*, has already been discussed in the previous section. The other reason, *children don't have these clothes* could perhaps be solved by applying an idea suggested by Najeeb.

Najeeb: *The school should buy some extra they can borrow.*

Solbakken School has already bought some skis and ski boots that the children can borrow for winter ski trips as will be seen in Chapter 7. At the time of this study they had not bought any outdoor clothing that students could borrow.

5.3 Comment on Chapter 5

In this chapter I presented the opinions and reflections of non-ethnic-Norwegian parents on school policy and on different topics related to their children's experiences in school-practices in nature. There was a general tendency for agreement among the parents in connection to different issues even though most of them were interviewed separately. There were two couples who were interviewed together: Najeeb and his wife, Amara; Amin and his wife, Ameria. All of the parents acknowledged the importance of nature in school practice. Despite that, most of them stated that they did not take their children on nature excursions outside of school. Shu was the only one in this group who took her children on family excursions in nature on a regular basis. She was also the only parent who stated that she wanted more detailed information about her son's activities at school. All of the other parents stated that they were satisfied with the amount and quality of the information they received from school. Many parents shared their reflections on possible reasons why some students did not participate on nature trips or came to outdoor excursions wearing inappropriate clothing. Some suggestions for reduction of the obstacles in student participation were voiced by the parents.

6 Ethnic- Norwegian Parents

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present the interviews with another group of parents. The fact that these parents are ethnic- Norwegian and have Norwegian as a native language was considered significant enough to place them in a separate group. Here I present the points-of-view of three ethnic-Norwegian informants, Tone, Iselinn and Maja. My intention was to also listen to their voices with regards to the majority of issues non-ethnic-Norwegian parents expressed their opinions on.

6.1.1 Weekly Schedule, Lesson Plans and Parent Meetings

When asked how they are informed about school, all ethnic- Norwegian parents agreed that they receive a weekly planner in addition to various handouts from school. Two out three Norwegian parents cited their own children and *talking to other parents and the teachers* as additional sources for information.

Iselinn explained: *“I get information] from my child, the teacher, from the website and by talking with other parents”*. Tone, another Norwegian parent, explained that even though she felt updated about academic activities, she did not learn much from the weekly schedule about the social activities that happened at school. However, she had developed her own strategy for getting social information. This is how she described it:

Tone: *...I have a boy and he is very much into talking, but he doesn't talk much about the social life and what they do. That's different when I talk to moms who have girls; they get a lot more information. So we have to ask a little bit, yeah.*

Tone confirmed to me that she *usually* talked to other parents to find out about social activities, she was not just referring to a one-time event. It should be pointed out that the other two Norwegian mothers also stated that sometimes they needed to seek information

about what was happening at school when the information was not in the weekly schedule. Therefore if a topic was not included, Tone did not hesitate to ask her son. If she did not get satisfactory information from him, she would speak to other mothers who had girls because in her opinion, “*they get a lot more information*”.

6.2 Living in Norway

6.2.1 Introduction

This section deals with parents’ opinions about the importance of nature in their own lives and in their children’s lives. It begins with parents’ narratives of their own childhood memories of nature. One of my objectives was to determine whether nature had in any way been a part of the lives of those informants.

6.2.2 Living in Contact with Nature

Childhood narratives like the one below were shared by all the informants. Despite the fact that two of them currently live in apartments in Oslo, all the informants had one thing in common: memories of a childhood in close contact with nature.

Tone: I am from an island, outside... So you get all the natural elements around very close actually. It's a lot of wind and rain and sea ... not much snow but ... heather moorland ... it's very typical for the western part and in the mountains...And there are beaches and small lakes.... and ...the northern wind ...It is very pretty... small roads and lots of small paths. And the northern seas are really... wild ... and the smell, it really smells soft, you know. The salt water is really salty. So we grew up in this, a lot of sea, but also...highlands. So we used to...walk in the woods. And we loved that. So we played in the woods and we played near the sea. And sometimes we had a small row boat...

Tone and Iselinn spoke earnestly about the part that nature had played in their childhoods and about their desire for their children to have a similar experience of close contact with nature and the outdoors.

Iselinn: *I think it (nature) is important as a part of being Norwegian, I guess. You're supposed to stay outside and play outside; we eat outside. It's a part of the Norwegian culture.*

Among all the parents, Iselinn was the one who most clearly voiced an active pursuit of a life in close contact with nature for her and her family and expressed criticism of the school and kindergarten as will be seen later on in this chapter.

6.2.3 Outside in All Kinds of Weather

All the informants agreed that children should be outside in all kinds of weather throughout the year provided they wore the right clothes. The parents also agreed that minus 10 was a satisfactory limit-temperature below which all children should be indoors. Tone recalls her own childhood in the western coast of Norway.

Tone: *I grew up in that system. You know what? It's fun being out in all kinds of weather. You really, feel the nature. Ok, it takes some effort to go out sometimes ...*

As she narrated in the excerpt above, Tone recalls *really* feeling the elements of nature when she was outside in “bad” weather. She was not the only parent with such recollections: the other two informants recalled similar experiences. They reminisced that initially they did not want to go outside but, once they did, they enjoyed it and sometimes did not wish to go back inside. All the informants agreed that for children it is not so much the weather that matters but the child's mood: sometimes boys and girls want to stay inside in sunny weather and go out in the rain. My interpretation of this is that children are not conditioned by the wish to stay indoors in the rain and go out in sunny weather like many adults but it is important for them to have the experience of being outside throughout the year.

Despite the above, two of the parents did not agree that children should have to go out during the fifteen minute recess if it was raining (or very cold).

Iselinn: *...they have done so that children must go outside during recess; (I agree that) it is important to get fresh air to get the head to work, but it could be we are too concerned about it at school - when you have a 10- min recess... so it is not necessary to go outside if it rains and the children get soaking wet - I think it was a lot of nonsense about it when I went to school, you had to be outside, even during (the short) recess.*

Iselinn and the other parents referred to the fact that they also had grown up having to go outside in their “10 minute break” (it is actually fifteen minutes long at Solbakken School). They explained in conversation that it was unnecessary to go through the trouble of having to get dressed for the rain and find that-- especially for the youngest children—the break is over by the time they are finished getting dressed.

6.2.4 Nature’s Potential

All the parents confirmed that their children should be outside in all types of weather but one of them wanted nature’s potential to be utilized even more. Iselinn expressed dissatisfaction with the way nature was being underutilized at Solbakken School.

Iselinn: I think that nature can be applied to any kind of learning, because we know that physical mastery is linked to learning...my children have also attended nature kindergarten and it's not like we thought it would be...we were disappointed ...I am absolutely convinced that is possible to use nature. I did not experience that school and kindergarten utilize the potential enough...I think well they learn at a theoretical level ...

Iselinn who has two children, one in Kindergarten and another in second grade, emphasized her dissatisfaction with the way nature was underused in kindergarten and in school. Above she expresses her conviction that nature can be used as a learning arena in all subjects. Additionally, later in the interview, she spoke about her disappointment with her daughter having to “skip” Science class because the child read above grade level. That meant the young girl had to have Reading in another class which met at the same time her own class had Science. When Iselinn explained to the teacher what the family had done to compensate for the missing Science classes, the teacher’s reaction had been: “Oh, that’s intense!” which displeased Iselinn even more. Her conclusion is that children are subjected to a theoretical approach to learning in school. Among all the parents Iselinn appeared to be quite interested in the potential of nature and the outdoors as learning arenas.

6.2.5 Learning in Nature

In this section I wanted to investigate parents' ideas about nature and its possibilities as a learning arena for their children. All the informants agreed that children could learn a lot in nature. All the parents reminisced about their own experiences as children in order to answer the question: "What kinds of things do children learn in nature in your opinion?" Here I include their most recurring answers.

The three informants stated that nature can be used to teach anything. According to Iselinn and Tone being in nature shows children that there is coherence in life. That means that when children are in nature they see the connection between human beings and the natural world. All three stated that children are also able to understand that nature is something that human beings can learn to deal with and utilize.

Another reason why it was considered very important for this group is that when children are in nature, their entire body and senses are involved in the experience; when this happens the knowledge that they acquire stays with them.

Tone: ...and I also think that the senses are also very vital to get the knowledge to stick...take smell (for example); smell is a strong memory activator... And maybe that's why nature ... teaches you things differently because the body is much more involved. When you touch the grass, when you stumble on a root, all these things give you different knowledge and memory. It helps...

My understanding of what Tone and the others wanted to say is that all that causes a physical impression which differs from the ordinary will be more easily remembered and will better stick in the memory of each child.

All of the informants stated that they spend a lot of their free time outdoors with their children, both in parks and in nature. Two of them stressed that most of that time is spent in nature. Even though one informant confessed that she and her children spend more time in parks, she stressed that they also spend time in nature because:

Maja: I think learning outside is the ultimate... I want the kids to be able to play and have fun without (the need for) all that material stuff.

Maja and the other parents stated that children could find enough things to play with in nature and they wanted to encourage that by spending time outdoors. Tone also emphasized that children practice both their fine and gross motor skills when they are in a forest or in a natural setting, in addition to other important skills, summarized by Tone's narrative below:

Tone: ...you need to learn how to behave and consider can you go there (to the mountains), can you not go there. They (her children) learn a lot of things by just doing them...handling a knife and checking the weather. (The weather) It's shiftier, of course, in the mountains. You have to pay attention to the weather. You learn how to pack your bag, what to bring in there. What do you need to have if you're stuck: first aid kit, all the necessary stuff. These things just get into the system ... and which water to drink and not to drink. If you run out of water, you always drink water but in the mountains you can drink running water but you can't drink still water. All these things you learn and more.

Tone explained in conversation that the fine and gross motor skills that she described above were something she had thought every child in Norway possessed. However, she talked to an old colleague who worked with institutionalized children and he explained that he had taken a group out in the woods in the Trondheim area and the youngsters stumbled and fell many times throughout the trip. The reason was they had never walked in the forest nor had they been in the mountains. My own interpretation from the above is that besides the skills enumerated by Tone, there are others that are not so apparent like observation skills, caution, cooperation, solidarity, risk evaluation and a sense of your own possibilities and limitations among others.

There were also some common arguments shared by all the parents: all of them wished to continue the tradition they had experienced when they were children: going on excursions in nature with their parents.

Iselinn: Yes, of course, it can be seen when the kids go on nature excursions. They pick insects, watch them, they talk about things, it's very important. It's fun, it brings us together more, more things happen - there's more to laugh about. There is more cohesion. That's why we go on trips with the family and stuff, so that we have something to experience together.

Tone also reasoned that in her point of view school-practices-in-nature also open up the classroom in a very different way so that the children would relate the knowledge they had acquired in the classroom with what they would see *in vivo* and they would name things as they hiked in the forest.

Tone: I would think that they would give them the basic terms and words for the things they meet...If you go somewhere I would also think that they would say something "oh here is a lot of pine forest", for example. These trees compared to those and do you see a difference, oh yeah...these things.

Two of the parents expressed that as children they themselves had felt freer; they reported that their boundaries were wider and that other children had perhaps the opportunity to show unexpected abilities or different need.

6.2.6 Typically Norwegian

The objective of this section is to determine parents' opinions about what is typically Norwegian. All the ethnic-Norwegian parents used the same expression to answer the question: "What is typically Norwegian?"

"Å gå på tur". "To go hiking!" (Iselinn, Maja, Tone)

This short answer, which was unanimous among all the informants, both ethnic-Norwegian and non-ethnic-Norwegian, can have many meanings in English, from a simple walk around the block, to a much longer excursion in the woods, the coast or in the mountains. In its simplest form, it usually involves carrying a backpack with water, coffee or tea a sandwich or a snack, and a light jacket. As described earlier in this thesis, it is important that the hiker have the right gear (artifacts) to have a comfortable experience. The social-cultural practice of going on hikes (outings, excursions) can be done alone or in large or small groups. One of the objectives of this part of the chapter was to examine how enmeshed in the cultural fabric of the family "å gå på tur" was. The parents' answers also showed that in their families this practice can assume different forms depending on the circumstance. All of them, however, reported having experienced some more often than others what Tone described in the narrative below.

Tone: This is something we do together across generations. When we go into nature, then we are often there as a family...and their grandparents often join in and it's a different kind of experience. This is when we are at the cabins... when we are able to get together of course. Then we are together all of us. And of course that's fantastic, you know. And you have...their grandmother, my mother, in charge and...(laughs) and there's lots of baked buns and small rolls. The kids can play outside of course and they don't have to have the grownups there all the time. But when we organize a hike and when we organize fishing it is something that is done across generations and it's just fantastic. And I know that it's a gift to them. I really do.

My interpretation of the narrative above and the descriptions from the other informants is that going on nature excursions is a social-cultural practice that brings Norwegians together where value is placed not only on the human elements but also on the unique characteristics of

nature inherent to each setting. When I reflected upon informants' narratives in this chapter, I concluded that nature came forth as an important element in the life experiences of the ethnic-Norwegian families who were part of this research study.

7 Teachers' Voice

In this chapter I explore teachers' points of view and reflections about the role and importance of nature in their own lives and in the lives of their students while they are at school.

Teachers' voices have special relevance because teachers are significant bearers of the Norwegian culture. In addition, they have daily, direct contact with most school-aged children for a substantial part of a child's day and are not only responsible for teaching academic skills but also for showing, modelling and teaching Norwegian cultural values.

7.1 Conceptions about the Importance of Nature

In this section I explore how teachers have opinions and understandings about the importance of nature on a personal and on a professional level.

7.1.1 Conceptions on a Personal Level

Nature is everywhere in Norway and so it comes as no surprise that it is also present in the lives of all the Norwegian informants. All the ethnic-Norwegian teachers have recollections of a childhood spent in close contact with the nearby nature. They reminisce about their past experiences:

Vigdis: I remember when I was little ... by Munkerud ... I went out in the morning and came back in the evening, my mother and father did not see me all day ... I guess I was 5 or 6, up on the trees, climbed, played football, played cowboys and Indians, outside all the time - and no one was worried about us.

Vigdis recalls a childhood free from safety concerns and indoor limitations: she would run out the door in the morning and wouldn't be seen until the evening. She recalled some of the games: she played *cowboys and Indians*; she climbed on trees and played soccer. She does not remember anyone being concerned about her safety. Another teacher, Thor, remembers his parents taking him and his brother out in nature every Sunday rain or shine; bad weather days were not impediments to his determined parents. Thor reminisces that as a child, he was perhaps not so enthusiastic about his family's absolute commitment to being out in nature.

Nowadays, when he looks back on his childhood, he considers them enrichment. In his own words:

Thor: *I have been in nature since I was very young- my parents took us out every Sunday. We should be outdoors. We had to go outside. Sometimes it was a nuisance, but when I look back on it now, it was just enrichment. We were taken outside in all kinds of weather.*

Tone is the only one of the teachers who did not grow up in Oslo. She was born and raised in Bergen but she, similarly to Thor, also has memories of trips to the forest where her parents and siblings were ready to go before 11:00 every Sunday regardless of the weather.

Tone: *I grew up in a family where we went out on our Sunday tour which is quite common in Norway ... before 11:00...*

Sesilje defines herself as a “nature- person” and she attributes this to her upbringing. Similarly to Thor, she was always dragged into nature by her parents.

Sesilje: *I think this must have to do with growing up; I had parents who always dragged me out into nature.*

Nowadays Sesilje and her husband are active grandparents who frequently go to their cottage in the woods where they hunt and go fishing, together with their two dogs. They are also initiating their two grandchildren in a life of close contact with nature.

What we can conclude is that all the teachers with Norwegian background have memories of a childhood spent in close contact with nature. In addition, they also learned from a very young age to adapt to the different kinds of weather through wearing the right clothes very much in tune with the well-known Norwegian saying: “*there is no bad weather, just bad (inappropriate) clothes*”.

All the teacher-informants agreed that in order for children to become nature-lovers, as Norwegians are known for being, it is important for adults to take youngsters to the forest and allow them to have positive experiences so that the children will wish to repeat them again.

7.1.2 Conceptions on a Professional Level

In this section I want to investigate Teachers' reflections about the Norwegian practice of taking children outdoors regardless of the weather. In Norway school field trips happen the entire year and it is generally understood (by Teachers, most parents and school staff) that it is the family's responsibility to make sure that the children have the right clothes, shoes and the necessary equipment such as skis and backpacks. This is particularly important since approximately fifty per cent of the pupils come from non-ethnic-Norwegian backgrounds and in Norway it is assumed that people adapt to the different kinds of weather by wearing appropriate clothes.

All the teachers supported the idea that children should be outside, regardless of the weather. Their arguments complemented each other. Here I have selected the unique points made by each of the teachers.

Sibel emphasized the motivational aspect: she accentuated how important it is that they are together, that they can talk together: She maintained that the air quality is much better outside and referred to the air in the classrooms as "bad". She stressed how invigorated students feel by the fresh air. She also stressed that the outdoors should be used much more, not just in connection with some subjects but with all the subjects.

Sibel: I think we certainly should use more of [being in nature], not only in a few subjects, but perhaps in all subjects. I think that certainly is very positive.

Sesilje thinks that children have to learn to be outside no matter what the weather is like. In her opinion they acquire experience and the children get a feeling of mastering. She lamented the fact that many children do not possess the right accessories.

Sesilje: The problem is that some fail to bring proper clothing, they come with canvas shoes even if we say they will wear rubber boots.

This comment illustrates a problem that affects all the interviewed teachers: many students do not come to school prepared to go on a trip to the woods. This unfortunate situation has many causes and possible consequences which will be analyzed in detail in the Obstacles to Participation section.

Tone, who originally comes from Bergen, remembered the frequent rain she experienced in her hometown; despite expressing dissatisfaction about being wet on rainy days, she explained that it is always a good thing to get used to being outside. *"It's a good thing when you get used to being outside regardless of the weather."* Like the other teachers, she also emphasized that wearing the right clothes is very important in determining the kind of experience a person will have in the outdoors.

Vigdis strongly supports the idea of children being in nature in all kinds of weather and theorizes that one of the reasons they have been so much in nature in Norway is because Norway has always been a very safe country and parents had no fear of allowing their children to go outside alone. However, Vigdis has some concerns about the future:

Vigdis: ...*It's very good, but ... there will be less and less of it. Norwegian kids are so much in nature ... because ... we have lived in a very safe country ... but it will probably happen that more parents will be afraid to let their children be outside.*

Vigdis fears that in the future when children are not in school there will be less unsupervised time outdoors since many parents will be afraid for their children's safety, something that did not happen when Vigdis was a child in the sixties.

7.1.3 Comment 7.1

There was unanimity among the teachers that it is positive for all children to be outside in all kinds of weather, regardless of ethnic background. Most of the teachers expressed a wish for more time outside. Sibel was particularly emphatic when she expressed that the outdoors should be used with all the subjects and not just some. Vigdis expressed concern that in the future time spent on unsupervised play in nature will be reduced due to parental fears for their children's safety.

7.2 Institutional Framing Views

In this section I want to investigate the kinds of knowledge or skills that teachers believe are necessary for students to learn at school. Are there any other kinds of skills that are crucial for

children to acquire in addition to the academic subjects? Can school- practices-in-nature contribute to some types of knowledge that are deemed important? The most important points from the answers given by the teachers will be included here.

7.2.1 Outcomes of Being in Nature

In Sibel's words learning the academic subjects is very important for children so that they will be successful in their future studies. However, it is equally important for children to learn social skills how to talk to each other (which also includes having the necessary language skills to carry on a conversation in a socially acceptable manner), how to solve problems, how to deal with challenges. She explains that many children have difficulty communicating properly with each other and some are unable to find solutions for difficult situations. It is clear that the need for the acquisition of proper social skills represents an important school priority among the informants and in that regard all the teachers stated that when students are outside, they are exposed to situations where the opportunity for the development of social skills occurs naturally. The teachers explained that when students are outside in nature they face challenges that foster cooperative work and social skills. ...

Sibel: I think it is very important for the lower grades are social skills, how to be towards each other, we have experienced problems with some students who are unable to talk properly to each other; some are unable to solve problems.

In addition, all the informants stated that when students are in nature, they have more interactions with each other than in an ordinary classroom. All the teachers explained that children also work in mixed ability groups where students are encouraged to work and help each other. All of them pointed out that some children who have social difficulties inside the classroom have a completely different behavior outside. They observed that some children, especially the more active ones may have knowledge of the outdoors they can share with other students and in that way give a positive contribution to the group. They also agreed that many children who may be shy or introverted in class may behave extrovertly outside. Some students who may appear demotivated in the classroom can display surprisingly good interest outside.

Vigdis brought up another area of importance: language.

Vigdis: *The language is of course important ... but school and the social aspect are just as important as the academic ... in Pisa surveys ... Norway does worse in the academic, but we have top scores for well-being in school ... and that's good because without enjoyment, you cannot learn .*

Vigdis emphasized that language skills are of utmost importance for much of the knowledge that is to be acquired at school. But she is in agreement with Sibel and the other informants that in school the acquisition of social skills is as important as learning academic subjects. Vigdis also stressed that even though Norwegian students do not score so high on the Pisa tests, they are at the top of the “enjoyment at school” scale. She pointed out how important it is for students to enjoy school and emphasized that without enjoyment there is no learning. She also implied that without proper language skills, the entire school experience becomes frustrating and almost impossible to bear.

Vigdis: *I have a (student) from He was born in Norway, moved to ... at four years old, moved back to Norway two years ago, one year in Welcoming class, began at... (Another school in Oslo) in the fall and was moved here one month ago because they claimed that he was bullied. Three languages he has, in a short time - and he speaks none of them -well. So he gets the totally ...confused when to "switch places" from one language to another. He acts exactly the same as those who do not know the language; he misunderstands, misinterprets, does not understand the codes among students and believes that giggling is bullying, etc. So language is outrageously important.*

Vigdis illustrated her argument about the fundamental importance of language with a narrative about one of her pupils. He was a small boy who had started first grade without being able to understand Norwegian. He had also moved to different countries where he had to speak different languages. As a result, he spoke three languages very badly. She reminisced that he just squeezed himself in a corner of the classroom and cried. That child had not attended kindergarten despite having been born in Norway. She remembered that he misunderstood his classmates' attempts for contact as unfriendly and rejected them. In that same account she stressed the importance of kindergarten for all children but especially for those who are non-ethnic-Norwegian who probably speak another language at home. She emphasized that teachers cannot do anything to require the children to attend kindergarten. That is something for politicians to do.

Vigdis: *As long as there is no law, no authority(to make it mandatory for children to attend kindergarten), and that(is something that) politicians can create; that it is a requirement that you must teach your child Norwegian before he starts school, when they are born in Norway and raised here.*

Thor was also one of the teachers who, in addition to Vigdis and Sesilje, emphasized the importance of attending kindergarten for the development of social skills. In his opinion, children who attend kindergarten learn to cooperate with each other and work together very early. He also explained that, for some children, socialization does not happen automatically. Many children have to practice socialization. In that regard, kindergarten also helps children in the development of social skills. Generally speaking, the children who attend kindergarten also establish a larger circle of friends than those who do not attend kindergarten.

Thor: One must practice to socialize. Children coming from kindergartner where they have done this (socialization) a lot, they succeed very fast. Children who have not attended kindergarten must be taught; we educators must practice (with them).

All the informants were in agreement that school practices in nature allow teachers and students opportunities for exposure to new situations and countless possibilities for vocabulary development.

Sesilje stated that many students appear to have good conversational vocabulary but in her opinion that is not enough. She explained:

Sesilje: Many children including some Norwegian children have good colloquial language, but they lack a deeper vocabulary... There are many of those expressions they do not understand, (that in a) way debases the Norwegian language a bit.

Sesilje appeared to downplay the importance of conversational vocabulary and, including Norwegian students in her statement, she explained that conversational vocabulary is often misleading. Students may be assumed to know more than they actually do. She agreed with Vigdis and the other teachers that one of the objectives of school is the development of language skills. Among those skills she included the need for learning different types of professional terminology so that students' vocabulary evolves beyond the mere superficial day-to-day conversations.

7.2.2 Curriculum through the Eyes of the Teachers

This section examines Teachers' understandings of the role of nature in the curriculum, "Kunnskapsløftet". There were different interpretations of how and where teachers thought nature should appear in teaching according to "Kunnskapsløftet".

All the informants explained that the current curriculum is not very specific about how nature should be used in teaching. All of the teachers stated that they were sure nature was present in the curriculum but two of them connected nature only with the teaching of science. Three of the informants had a clear idea of how nature should be used while two of the teachers appeared unsure. Four of the teachers agreed that the present curriculum and the way its teaching objectives were described appeared more limiting than those of the previous curriculum. All of the teachers thought that school-practices-in-nature should happen in all grade levels. All the Teachers emphasized that the teaching objectives listed in the curriculum are what school instruction should be based on. Sesilje stated that nowadays there are fewer expectations about what children should learn compared to twenty years ago. *"If you consider a 5th grade now compared to 20 years ago they would learn a lot more things in nature than now"*. She did not appear to think that the new topics such as biotechnology compensate for the alleged reduced expectations on the level of knowledge children shall have at present. Sesilje continued her critical evaluation of Kunnskapsløftet and commented that if one should compare old science textbooks with new ones, they would see how much more there was in the old books.

Another teacher who took a critical stance towards KL06 was Thor. In his view there were more limitations associated with the present curriculum than with the previous one. According to Thor, the present curriculum focuses excessively on competence objectives and that causes him to feel more limited in his teaching than he did with the previous curriculum. Thor was also critical of assessment tests, which, in his opinion, control what students should learn. Continuing his positive assessment of the previous curriculum, Thor expressed approval of the abundance of examples on different topics in L97 that, in his opinion, meant he had more choices on how to teach certain themes. Finally, he stated that L97 seemed to take a more holistic approach, taking into consideration the whole person than KL06.

Thor: *...With L97 there were many examples of how to work and what you should learn. One would learn about literature so and so, one could for example learn about Astrid*

Lindgren, Tove Nilsson, there were examples - I felt that it did not steer me so much. I felt that L97 had the entire human vision that allowed the teachers to have more freedom.... Now I feel much more limited that all students should learn specific goals. It hangs also together with the political assessment tests... there are more national tests that control what we should teach students.

When I asked Thor his opinion about tests, he answered that if a class has a low score in math, for example, tests should be used to help that class. He disapproved that tests should be used in the media, especially to compare schools. He shares the same opinion as Vigdis who thinks that tests should be used to discuss content in teaching. According to Vigdis and Thor test results should not be utilized to compare schools among themselves or to compare Norway to other countries for two main reasons. Firstly, there are several factors that influence results in different countries and secondly, because there are many positive things that happen in schools in Norway that are not included in any of the tests, for example, “enjoyment” with the school experience (“trivsel”) , independence and cooperation.

Thor: ...I think that schools can use the results, if a class has a low score in mathematics, so the school can help the class. Then something happened to the class if there are many students who have bad score...but the results are used incorrectly ...in the media...to compare schools. It is a trend I do not like.

Ellie: Do you think it is important to compare Norway to other countries?

Thor: It helps in the sense that we are discussing the content in teaching... But ... (the fact) that Finland has many good results in academic knowledge ...it says something about Finland and schools in Finland. In Norway we believe that students learn to be independent, learn to cooperate, to grow into wise adults.

Testing seems to be “the invisible presence” in the interviews I had with teachers. There were few direct references to tests such as the Thor’s remarks above. All the teachers, however, explained that there were all the “other things to do in the classroom” perhaps hindered teachers from spending more time in school-practices-in-nature. The following exchange between Sesilje and me illustrates the point.

Ellie: Are you satisfied with the amount of time you spend in nature with your students?

Secilje: I'm a little unsure; we have so many other things we need to do. Ideally, I'd be out more often, but I think we never get time to do all we have to do...

Ellie: What other things do you have to do?

Sesilje: *We've got a lot in Norwegian and mathematics and these core subjects - it is clear that when we go out we take off hours too. We must certainly get good results...it's important.*

Ellie: *Are you are talking about the tests?*

Sesilje: *Yes, I have them (always) on my mind.*

Besides the above, the influence of a teacher's personality is also another factor that may influences how much time a class dedicates to school-practices-in-nature. Despite the clear skill objectives enumerated in the present curriculum, all teachers agreed that the way to achieve those goals depends on the individual teacher's personality or, as Vigdis put it: *"your personality reflects also in your teaching."* Vigdis illustrated her point stating that it is not written in the curriculum that math should be taught in the forest but that math should be made "concrete". The way to do that is left for the teacher to decide. Therefore a teacher has the power to choose to work indoors with manipulatives or computers or decide to go outdoors to the school yard or even to the forest. Vigdis who defined herself as "a nature-lover" used the example of a moor to illustrate the importance of the senses:

Vigdis: *Moor, what is a moor? Should we then show (the students) only a picture of a moor? When you go to a place and there is a moor, you can go over to it and ask (the students): "can you smell it?" A moor smells sweet, and then you remember ... but not just by looking (at a picture), so (experiencing)... it is very important.*

According to Vigdis in order to really understand what a moor is, it is necessary to *experience* a moor; in her opinion pictures illustrating "what a moor is" would not convey its full meaning. It is only by *experiencing* a moor, having been in a moor, knowing how sweet it smells that students can really understand the concept and also remember it.

According to Thor there is very little in KL06 that addresses nature and the environment. He agreed with the other teachers that in the general part of the curriculum nature is presented as an important part of school life. However, he pointed out that when one goes down to each competence objective it is only in science that more emphasis is placed on the environment. This last point is backed up by the two youngest teachers who only thought of science when I asked them about where nature appeared in the curriculum. Thor states that the role of nature is rather toned down in Kunnskapsløftet. As an example of this, he cited one of the competence objectives for first and second grades: *"students should learn about a tree in the neighborhood, follow the tree and record its development throughout the year."* He suggested

that the tree's developmental trajectory could have been connected to the local environment. In the case of Solbakken School the trees' development could have been connected to the existence of a major highway and an incineration plant nearby. He criticized the fact that there are no such connections in the current curriculum or in the textbooks that follow it. Thor stressed that connections among topics and among subjects are crucial: through them students understand that in the real world there are no isolated themes. He emphasized that all things are connected; all things are interdependent. However, according to Thor's critical view of Kunnskapsløftet, it is up to the individual teacher to make such connections.

7.2.3 Nature: Motivation, Self-Knowledge and Personal Contact

In this section my interest is to investigate whether, in the teachers' point of view, there is an observable connection between physical activities and motivation to learn. In addition, to determine the kinds of benefits or possible drawbacks teachers observe from their students being in nature and the outdoors. The interviewed teachers were certain that there was a lot children could learn outdoors and confirmed that they could hold classes in nature despite their different levels of experience.

All the informers reiterated the importance of being outside for all children. The teachers reported that their students ask more questions when they are outside and appear more interested in learning more about animals, vegetation, ecosystems and all the things that catch their attention as they move about and observe nature. In addition, they confirmed that when students are outdoors the ones who wear the right clothing are more at ease being outside. The teachers reported that being outside seems to trigger students' curiosity and disposition to learn. ...

Sibel: When we are on trips and when we are outdoors, then I feel that they are more motivated. I feel that they - what can I say - they have sort of an inner motivation that makes them want to learn. It is a completely different learning than sitting, watching doing what the teacher explains all the time, much more motivating...

Sibel distinguished the learning that takes place outside from the one that happens in the classroom, and described classroom learning as children passively sitting at their desks trying to keep up with what the teacher is telling them to do. The motivational aspect was a

strong point for all the teachers. According to them, while students are outdoors they have the possibility of coming into contact with so many new “things to be investigated”, that fact seems to trigger their curiosity. In addition, all their senses are “working full time” during outdoor excursions as Vigdis’s narrative below shows. The importance of sensorial elements in learning is evident and they have also colored most of the episodes described by the other teachers.

Vigdis: I remember the class I have now, I was in the woods when I started with the third (grade) and saw a boy who had never eaten a blueberry in his life; and now he picked it, touched it, - you get to use your senses in the woods.

Vigdis continued her narrative and described the boy’s utter delight in tasting a blueberry. She concluded that, because of that episode, she was sure that the child would never forget what a blueberry was: no number of written descriptions could replace the experience of using all his senses to learn what a blueberry was. For many of the children, an excursion in nature is, in a way, an extension of that boy’s blueberry experience: getting immersed in what one is supposed to be learning about and all the inherent surprises that invariably happen whenever one is outside.

All the teachers were positive that students’ participation in school-practices-in-nature leads to learning that goes beyond the academic subjects. The extract below where Vigdis narrates the learning progression of the children in the Welcoming class illustrates this fact well:

Vigdis: You should have seen the Welcoming class in the winter, they have skis there (that they can loan) ... and they put on skis every break time out here on the ground and into the schoolyard. On the first day, they didn’t know what was the front or the back (of their skis), they fell ...and even went into the elevator wearing skis – but... in a few weeks...they became so clever that they could jump and could... play with... skis on...

The narrative above illustrates, among other things, the importance of being able to learn to utilize cultural tools or artifacts (Chapter 3). The possibility of learning to use such an important cultural tool as skis in (the *figured world Norwegianess*, see also Chapter 8) Norway, afforded the children a whole series of behaviors and experiences that perhaps would have not occurred without them. Using the terminology of one of this thesis’ theoretical frameworks (Chapter 3), Vigdis described a situation where the children in the Welcoming

class *authored the world* (Chapter 3): wearing the appropriate and necessary artifacts, they were able to “jump and, ... play with skis on...” The children were also assigned a positional identity by Vigdis: the students were called “clever”, as a result of their having mastered an important social practice in (*the figured world Norwegianess*, see Chapter 3) Norway. I must point out that the use of the cultural tool “skis” was crucial to all the events described above. Another illustration of teaching beyond academic subjects is described below:

Vigdis: *But I'm also concerned that when we are in the forest, they (my students) will learn conservation... that they learn to preserve nature and follow these unwritten rules like...you do not pick an unknown mushroom ... just to throw it away... and that one always goes on the right ...when you go skiing, that one shows respect...and care... in slopes, and in the forest...*

Vigdis showed that as a part of school-practices-in-nature, children also learn rules about appropriate behaviors in nature; she emphasized the importance of respect towards living things and to others who may be sharing nature with them.

As previously stated, there was agreement among all the teachers that for children it is very important to be outside, and another argument used by four of the informants was that young students quickly become bored of sitting inside reading books about things they could experience first-hand outside. More significantly, according to them, when children are bored, they do not learn much.

The majority of the teachers emphasized that after their students participate in activities outside, they return to the classroom and discuss those experiences, write about them and draw them. The activities become part of the children's repertoire of experiences which are then used as much as possible by the teacher instead of traditional textbooks or dittos which represent a more distant reality from the one lived by the children. Three of the teachers use nature and the school surroundings as inspiration for teaching different themes, subjects and the basic skills listed in the curriculum.

Three of the teachers state that when children are in unknown surroundings in nature, they have the possibility of learning a lot about themselves. They assert that hiking on rough terrains, climbing on trees, falling and getting a little bruised or a skinned knee are all healthy experiences. They enable children to develop and learn self-esteem by being outside, learning how to find solutions for problems and overcoming difficulties. In their view, by having experiences in nature, in addition to learning about their bodies and how to move, students

also learn about their personalities, about themselves as people, about their possibilities and their limitations. They expounded that all these experiences in nature can be transferred into a pedagogical context where teachers and students can speak not only about nature but also about life, death, love or whatever one wishes to talk about. All the teachers emphasized that they have a completely different kind of contact with the children when they are out in nature and many questions come to them as teachers and students are hiking or sitting around a campfire. They declared that nature enables teachers to talk to children about themes that would have been more difficult to discuss in a classroom.

Three of the teachers asserted that in nature students learn not only about academic topics but also about pervading human themes such as life, love, and death. All five teachers see nature as a kind of communication-facilitator. According to them being in nature creates the conditions for discussing complex, sometimes difficult topics such as life and death. Thor is not alone when he narrates:

Thor: I have another type of contact when they I am sitting around a campfire, eating food and grilling sausages. Suddenly there occur themes that we would not be able to talk about so deeply in a classroom.

Sesilje included another element of significance: motor skills.

Sesilje: Yes clearly, (being in nature is important) both to learn what happens in nature, but also motoric. One can observe a very big difference between in people who never go in nature. There is a big difference between walking in nature and walking on asphalt, experiencing and seeing all the things they need to learn; I think (being in nature) is important in many areas.

She pointed out that one can see a big difference between people who are used to being in nature from those who never are. She explained that walking and moving in nature are completely different experiences from walking and moving in asphalt. In conversation, she illustrated her point describing the experience of a young boy she had known who had been an excellent soccer player but who had never been on an outing in the forest, that child had difficulty keeping up with his colleagues when he went on a class trip to the woods. She remembered that he kept on falling because he had not been used to the forest's uneven terrain. Moreover, the teachers stressed that when students are in nature, they experience first-hand the things they need to learn about. They also stressed how important it is for children to wear the right clothes when they are outside so that they do not feel cold, wet or

uncomfortable. I will further explore the issues of appropriate clothing and gear in the “Obstacles to Participation” section.

All the teachers observed that cooperation occurs naturally when students are outside. Tone exemplified by saying that when pupils are on the beach and they want to catch a crab, they have to work together to be able to accomplish their goal of catching the crab. Tone contrasted the natural cooperation that occurs in nature with the somewhat “imposed” cooperation in a classroom where the teacher often has to tell the students to work together.

Tone: ... It is the interaction that occurs when one is out on tour and stuff. It really encourages cooperation, natural partnership. If we are, for example, by the sea or something so they must cooperate if they are going catch crabs or something...

Moreover, she stated that it was easier to see whether her students had learned a particular topic when teaching happened outside. Tone explained that the lack of actual experiences in the classroom makes it difficult to determine what students have learned when they are inside. Tone’s narrative below illustrates well a typical outdoors scene in contrast with classroom instruction:

Tone: ... When you have had a lesson or a normal school day in the classroom, then you never know what the students are left with that day. That is because they haven’t had any experiences, right? But when they are out then ... they find a little bug and then they learn something by looking at it, like an insect has six legs.

Ellie: And where the insect was.

Tone: Yes, say... under a rock. And then we learned the word "under" for foreign language children; under a rock and not in the rock... when they are out ... then I believe that it is much easier that knowledge will sit in the head and does not fall out on the way out of the classroom.

Tone exemplified a point about which all the informants were in agreement: the learning that takes place as a result of a child’s own experience and active participation is more easily observed by the teachers than the learning that takes place when students are passive recipients of information. The former type of learning happens more easily outside; the latter occurs more commonly inside. In addition, Tone’s last statement that “*knowledge does not fall out*” when a student leaves school means that memory and the retrieval information happen more easily when the object of learning is part of a student’s own realm of experiences.

She concluded her narrative with another important point made by all the teachers, that when students experience something, it is much easier to “keep it in their head” or, in other words, to remember it. According to all the teachers experiences happen more frequently when students are outdoors.

7.2.4 Teaching in Nature

This section sheds light on another area of interest to me: teaching outdoors. I wanted to investigate what thoughts the teacher-informants had regarding teaching in nature.

All of them were unanimous that it was not only possible but three out of five had done it on a regular basis. Sibel who was in her first year as a teacher had not tried it yet despite being confident that it could be done.

Three of the teachers had much to say on the subject of teaching in nature. Sesilje’s view is that it is possible to teach all subjects in nature without any additional planning besides what the teacher would normally do for a regular class indoors. When I asked her whether students would be able to concentrate as much outside as inside, she was quite positive and added that when students are outdoors moving about in nature, touching and coming in contact with new things, they incorporate a new kind of experience. She also makes the distinction between “having school outdoors” and “going on an outing”. Her understanding of “school outdoors” involves specific topics the students are supposed to learn while they are outside. Thus when students are in nature moving their bodies and touching things they find out that a whole new perspective on learning unfolds before them. She considers this new perspective to be quite important. Moreover, in many situations when pupils are outside they have the opportunity to be face to face with the topic they are supposed to be studying. As a result, the object of study becomes part of their experienced reality, which places the children in the role of being in charge of their own learning; in Sesilje’s own words:

Sesilje: *We don’t go on excursions any more, we have outdoor school ... We have themes so we know this is what we will be working with while we are outside ... You need to be aware of what you’re going to do, but you don’t have to prepare anything more than if you’d been inside.*

Vigdis included a myriad of examples of how to integrate academic concepts, physical exercise and activities in nature which clearly showed that she was accustomed to teaching in nature. She explained that when children are small they have one school day outside every week. That day is filled with learning activities in nature for the children. Vigdis emphasized that the possibilities are endless and stated that teachers should use their creativity to design exciting activities for their students.

7.2.5 Conclusion

The section above showed that all the informant-teachers agreed about the positive benefits of educational activities in nature for their students. Some of the more experienced teachers declared to have practiced outdoor-learning (Chapter 2) as often as once a week for first graders. The two youngest teachers did not use the term school-outdoors but they said they go on nature excursions. All of the teachers concur that these outdoor activities have academic, physical, psychological and social objectives.

7.3 Obstacles to Participation

This research showed that there are many obstacles that hinder students from participating in school-practices-in-nature. I have grouped the obstacles according to categories that will be examined in this section. They are a result-collection of facts narrated in the interviews with the teachers.

7.3.1 Communication Problems

There is more to communication between schools and families than meets the eye. When teachers or school officials give handouts or post something in Fronter, they may think that all families will receive the information in a matter of a few hours. My study shows that communicating with families is not as simple as one would like to believe even when schools do their best for divulging information. All those interviewed agree that schools send families information about children's scheduled activities on a regular basis. The following is a typical description of how families receive information from school.

All the interviewed teachers described that they have a "very nice website", where information is posted. Parents get lesson plans every week, which include what academic goals the teachers are working towards and whether there are any special events that week. The teachers also use Fronter, on which they have received extra instruction with each grade level having its own separate room in Fronter. In addition, each grade level has its "Fronter-responsible-person" so parents can be constantly updated. The aim is that the school should be paper-free, with all information being collected digitally.

Thor: Every week the parents receive a weekly plan and a lesson plan. When the children are small then it is included what activities they have every day. In first grade, it is also on the plan if we have outdoor school, if we are going on an excursion, if we have physical education outside...

As we can see, pertinent school information is sent to families at least once a week so it is possible for parents to find the necessary details on their children's school activities each week. At first glance everything appears to be as it should: information is sent to parents in Norwegian, both on paper and on the Internet. Thus, the parents who have computer skills and speak Norwegian should have no problem knowing what their children are learning/working on at school. However, in many schools in Oslo and in many cities in Norway there are

always some parents who are not computer literate and/or perhaps some who do not speak Norwegian. What happens in this case? I asked Vigdis about that and she said:

Vigdis: ... *I would say that the majority of parents understand Norwegian. But there are some who have not learned Norwegian ... then it is clear that one ought to catch them - and, one might be able to do it in kindergartens, health clinics, as well as school. There must be a system that is there to teach them the language...*

As it can be deduced from the statement above, Vigdis does not appear content that there are parents of school-age children who do not understand enough Norwegian to read a lesson plan. She emphasized that it was important that those parents be “caught” at kindergartens, local clinics or in schools. She even stated there should be “et apparat”, a system that could be used so that parents could learn Norwegian.

Tone agreed with Vigdis and acknowledged that there are some parents who do not read the weekly planer.

Tone: *It's not everyone who reads. There are some who are very good to follow up, they always keep track of the homework and when we are going on an excursion, they have everything with them. So if the weekly planer says that they should have extra food, then they have extra food; if it says they should have extra drinks, they have extra drinks. But then there are some who never get it, who do not read...*

Tone was not sure why some parents appear not to read the weekly plan. Despite the fact that among the parents who do not read it there are some who are ethnic-Norwegian, all the interviewed teachers agreed on one fact: the majority of those who come to school unprepared are non-ethnic-Norwegian children.

At the present time Solbakken School does not have any formal mechanism to reach those parents and determine why they do not comply with the instructions in the weekly plan. In order to get those parents to comply with school recommendations, a lot will depend on the relationship between parents and teachers and how much communication there is between them. There is also the possibility that some children whose parents do not speak Norwegian could be extra attentive about what happens at school and act as intermediaries between school and home but that possibility remains unlikely, especially in the lower grades. The most probable consequence is that those parents who have not learned Norwegian will remain at the margin of what happens in school and their children will also suffer the consequences of their parents' lack of information.

7.3.2 Teacher Training

Despite the fact that all of the teachers showed interest in teaching outdoors and all of them habitually take their students on school-practices- in-nature, not all of them thought they were especially prepared for teaching in nature. The youngest among the teachers, Sibel, did not feel that her Teacher education at college prepared her sufficiently for teaching outdoors.

Sibel: We have gotten very little competence in teaching outside ... teaching outside is completely different from teaching inside; they are two different things, especially for us who live in Norway; so colleges and universities must give us conditions so that we have competence to teach outdoors. I do not have this competence.

One of the problems that Sibel, a first-year teacher at the time of the interview, experienced was how to hold students' attention on a specific theme while they were hiking in the forest. In addition, she expressed concern about how to make sure the entire class heard her explanations, considering she had a long line of students behind her. The other teachers, who had several more years of experience, did not report any problems teaching outdoors; in fact, they reported that teaching outdoors required no extra preparation compared to teaching inside.

7.3.3 Appropriate Clothes and Shoes, Absenteeism

All the teachers reported having problems with students not having appropriate outdoor clothes and shoes, especially rainwear, winter clothing and water-proof hiking shoes. All the informants report that a substantial number of students do not wear the proper gear when they come on nature excursions and that may cause a direct impact on the kind of nature experience they have. Sesilje went so far as to say that only 25% of her students had the right gear to go on field trips in nature and classified students' lack of appropriate gear as their "biggest problem". Their list of needs includes wool underclothes, waterproof boots, season-appropriate hiking clothes or, in other words, clothes and shoes that keep children warm and dry.

None of the teachers were able to explain why some parents do not comply with the instructions for school trips written in the weekly plan families receive every week. This problem affects a minority of ethnic-Norwegian children but, undoubtedly, the majority of those with inappropriate gear are non-ethnic-Norwegian students. All the teachers expressed concern about the quality of the experience such students have. The type of participation a child has in nature depends in great part on having the right gear. When a student is wet, cold, or uncomfortable because she is not wearing the proper clothes or shoes, that student will probably not take full advantage of being in nature as the others who wear the proper gear. In conclusion, the pupil's learning possibility on that occasion may be negatively impacted, depending on how uncomfortable the student is.

It is not good to go hiking in rubber boots... if they go with hiking boots it is a totally different experience. It's the same with ski equipment and stuff.

It must be said that on nature excursion days the problem of absent students and/or students who come to school wearing inappropriate clothes was reported by all the teachers. When the teachers were asked what they thought should be done about this situation, several alternatives were presented: a "library" of outdoor clothes and gear that children could borrow, flea markets tips to parents and direct talk with the parents. All the teachers showed great interest in having all students participate positively in nature excursion days as much as possible. Since the school is organized in teams according to grade level, A few of the solutions listed above had already been put into practice by some of the teams at the time of the interviews. However, all the teachers expressed that there was still considerable need for more clothes and equipment. Additionally, it is also necessary to try to eliminate the continuous absenteeism of some students on excursion days. In that regard, as a result of this study I observed that the most experienced teachers were the ones that narrated direct talks with the parents as Thor's example shows:

Thor: We must try to work with their parents and try to find out why students do not come. Sometimes I have found that parents try to avoid the subject, that it is coincidence that he (the student) is absent every Thursday - then I try to be direct, it is every time we're on tour. We must dare to have a direct tone with parents.

All the teachers report the need for talking individually with parents and not being "sidetracked" by those who try to avoid addressing the issue of absenteeism during nature-excursions. It became clear from my interviews with teachers that there are some non-ethnic-Norwegian parents who do not understand the importance and meaning of school-practices-

in-nature. One of the reasons for this lack of understanding has to do with the fact that many non-ethnic-Norwegian parents themselves did not have positive nature experiences while attending school in their native countries. Thor is aware of this and explained his direct approach to parents: *“when you find parents who are willing to find solutions - we will facilitate. We ... try to explain to parents what we do, take lots of pictures, show them - that's it – that is the way it works.”* He is not the only teacher who is earnest in talking to parents: two of the other teachers described similar direct approaches with positive results. Therefore, in the majority of situations when a teacher dares to be direct in confronting parents, the former can succeed in showing the latter that in Norway nature trips are not dangerous; moreover, they are an integral part of their child's school experience.

This section dealt with the many obstacles that may prevent school-practices- in nature from happening more often and, in some cases, of happening at all. We concluded that these hindrances may originate in the families, in the schools and even in the interpretation of the present curriculum and standardized tests. A discussion of possible solutions is one of the themes of the next chapter, “Discussion”.

7.4 Conclusion to Chapter 7

This chapter echoed teachers' reflections on important learning issues affecting school children when they are outdoors. It was apparent that several of the reported positive outcomes were mediated by the fact that students were in nature. Those positive outcomes included motivation for learning, increased curiosity, possibility for additional development of social, verbal and motor skills, among others. Teachers also voiced discontent against communication difficulties with certain families, particularly those of non-ethnic-Norwegian background. School-practices-in-nature were considered positive by all the teachers.

8 Discussion in the Light of the Research Findings

8.1 Introduction

“Culture is a toolkit of techniques and procedures for understanding and managing your world” was one of Bruner’s quotes that came to my mind as I observed the behavior of children outdoors in ordinary school days in Norway. In the years of working with children in different settings, in other countries I had never observed such confidence in dealing with rain, with snow, with being outdoors. The children acted as if they did not notice the changes in weather the way I did. I also witnessed teachers trying to help those who might have forgotten to put on their jackets or scarves, to find them and put them on. At school most of the adults behaved in the same way the children did; the only ones who appeared to have adjustment problems to the weather (complaining and talking about warmer countries) seemed to be non-ethnic Norwegians like me. I understood, as I saw how the teachers encouraged all the children to go outside even in bad weather, that it was important for everyone to be outdoors regardless of weather conditions. I concluded that I was witnessing a unique, cultural phenomenon. Apropos cultural phenomenon, Bruner appears to support my observations of the young students’ behaviors in nature (Bruner, 1996, p. 151).

*...being a member of a culture means performing the activities that the context “around you requires”
...education is not just about conventional school matters like curriculum or standards or testing. What we resolve to do in school only makes sense when considered in the broader context of what the society intends to accomplish through its educational investment in the young.*

In other words, the job of schools goes much beyond the “official” teaching the academic subjects in the curriculum. Schools also have the task of preparing the young to live in the society they are a part of. Living in Norway demands preparedness for the broad spectrum of weather conditions that are a characteristic of Norway. Thus what I witnessed outside were examples of the facet of education that Bruner was referring to in the quote above. This reflection led me to the conclusion that the children were *learning Norwegianess*. The concept of *Norwegianess* will be carefully discussed throughout in this chapter

These observations and subsequent reflections were the original sparks for this thesis. As previously explained, (Chapter 1.1), my research objective in this thesis is to investigate what

role nature has in public school, particularly in a public school where approximately half of the student population is non-ethnic-Norwegian. In Chapter 7 I analyzed teachers' reflections about the role of nature in school practice. In Chapters 5 and 6 I also analyzed the opinions of two groups of parents, ethnic-Norwegian and non-ethnic-Norwegian, concerning their points-of-view about their children's participation in school-practices-in-nature. The discussion of the empirical findings will be the basis for this chapter where the research findings will be presented in the light of the thesis's theoretical framework.

At this point, for the sake of clarity and better readability, I wish to review the two main-research questions and the two sub-research questions that were introduced in the Introduction Chapter of this thesis (1.1).

I have asked two *Main Research Questions*. The first one is:

What are the points of view of parents and teachers about the role of school-practices-in-nature in school and in the curriculum in communities with many non-ethnic-Norwegian families?

The first part of the main research question above is directed at parents and asks their opinions about school-practices-in-nature in a multi-ethnic community in Oslo, Norway. The other part of the main research question focuses on the opinions of the children's teachers about school-practices-in nature and about their role in the curriculum.

The second *Main research Question* is:

In the opinion of teachers, what are the benefits, if any, of school-practices-in-nature to children's learning?

This second main research question focuses on the positive effects, in case they exist, for *all* children, of school-practices-in-nature.

Sub-Research Questions: Empirical and Theoretical

In order to answer the first main research question in the best possible way and to get detailed and nuanced accounts of the opinions of parents I have also designed the following empirical Sub-Research Question:

How are the opinions of non-ethnic-Norwegian parents about school-practices-in nature similar or different from the opinions of ethnic-Norwegian parents?

Despite the fact that my focus is on the opinions of all parents, I believe it is important to listen to the voices of both groups: ethnic-Norwegian and non-ethnic Norwegian parents, in order to achieve a better understanding of the areas of agreement and whether there are tensions or disagreements. Therefore the first, empirical sub-research question separates the views of ethnic-Norwegian parents and non-ethnic Norwegian parents as a means of adding better understanding and depth of interpretation.

The second Sub-Research Question is theoretical.

How are school-practices-in-nature a part of Norwegianess?

The theoretical sub-research question above focus on school-practices-in-nature and in the concept of *Norwegianess* as it is conceptualized in this thesis. It investigates those practices and explains in what ways they take place in *the figured world Norwegianess*.

8.2 Findings

8.2.1 Introduction

This section focuses specifically on comparing and contrasting the different empirical research findings. Initially the focus will be on the differences between the two groups of parents: ethnic-Norwegians and non-ethnic-Norwegians. Secondly, I will discuss the points of agreement between the same two groups. Thirdly the focus will be on non-ethnic Norwegian parents and teachers. Fourthly, I will discuss findings that are connected to the opinions of parents and teachers about the children who do not participate in school-practices-in-nature. Afterwards the focus will be on the research questions addressed to the teachers. My interest is in finding not only similarities and differences between the groups, but also possible tensions and areas in need of further research. As explained in the Methodology Chapter (4),

some interviews were conducted in English; others were conducted in Norwegian. There was a third group of informants who used both languages. The choice of language, English, Norwegian or both was made by each informant. All interview answers as well as the Norwegian reference books and articles which did not have official English translations at the time I wrote this thesis, were translated by the author. When answers were given in English, the original narrative texts were kept, even if they contained occasional grammatical mistakes, in order to preserve their authenticity.

8.2.2 Differences between Ethnic and Non-Ethnic Norwegian Parents: School, Childhood Memories, Being in Nature

There were commonalities in diverse areas between the two groups of parents. Several important points that showed similarities as well as differences between the two groups were brought forth during the analysis of the interview data. In this section I will enumerate the points of divergence.

A noticeable difference was the level of assertiveness to obtain desired information from school. Ethnic Norwegian parents seemed to actively seek the information they wanted to have. They included their own children, other parents and the teachers as possible sources for information about school matters. My interpretation is that ethnic-Norwegian parents appear to have a more assertive stance towards securing their right to receive information. Such an attitude appears more natural coming from ethnic Norwegians since they are familiar with the school system and are fluent in the language. Another difference was that Norwegian parents emphasized that they habitually spent a portion of their free time in nature; some of them even wanted more time for school-practices-in-nature, while all non-ethnic Norwegians stated that they *knew* spending time in the outdoors was part of the Norwegian culture, but all of them confirmed that being in nature was not inherent to their cultures nor did they have any recollection of being in nature when they were children. Some of them expressed that they did not know “what to do” in nature. As for the Norwegian parents, all of them remembered care-free childhoods with plenty of time spent in nature, both as a part of their family experiences and also because they attended school in Norway. Shu was the only non-ethnic

Norwegian parent who recalled having spent time in the outdoors in her childhood and she explained that it was something that she had enjoyed doing with her friends because she was “an outdoor-type person”. Despite that, Shu reminisced that she did not have as many opportunities as she would have liked to spent time in nature in China, because school priorities had been different there.

In *Culture of Education* Bruner examines a finding by Harriet Zuckermann about the fact that a person’s chance of winning the Nobel Prize increases dramatically when s(he) has worked in the laboratory of someone who has won the Nobel Prize (Bruner, 1996, p. 154). One of the main contributing factors to this, according to Bruner, is that by virtue of working in the same location, the person already belongs to a “community in whose extended intelligence (s) he shares” (Bruner, 1996, p. 154, italics by me). According to this thesis’ Theoretical Framework Chapter (3), the community Bruner refers to in the example above, is a Figured World. Thus I will rephrase his statement saying that a person’s chance of winning the Nobel Prize increases substantially when (s) he is also a part of the Figured World of Nobel Prize winners. The above has similarities with regards to the attitudes of the two different groups of parents and the research findings of this thesis. Ethnic Norwegian parents are a part of the Figured World that in this thesis I have labeled Norwegianess. They understand the rules and behaviors of that Figured World because they belong to it by virtue of being Norwegian and having attended schools in Norway. Non-ethnic Norwegian parents, on the other hand, were not familiar with the cultural practices of the Figured World Norwegianess (to be discussed further, later on in this chapter), which involve, among other things, contact with teachers on an equal basis, being pro-active in pursuing information from school and having close contact with nature, both in one’s past history and as a part of one’s present family practices. Therefore, remembering Bruner and Zuckermann, Norwegian children have a better chance of displaying culturally appropriate behaviors in school-practices-in nature. Clearly I am not claiming that addressing teachers as equals or being proactive are only Norwegian characteristics; there are many other societies that possess those traits in the West, among them, the Norwegian society. Nonetheless, those are not the typical characteristics of the non-Western cultures to which the informant-parents belong.

However, the most significant difference between the two groups were the accounts of several non- ethnic Norwegian parents who stated that they knew *other* parents could not understand school information (therefore were not informed about school matters) because either one or

both parents could not read Norwegian. In terms of the Theoretical Framework, *Figured Worlds*, I consider the school and its own practices, including school-practices-in-nature, to be an integral part of the *Figured World Norwegianess*. As stated before, the concept of *Norwegianess* will be discussed later in this chapter, but at this point, it can be simply defined for the purpose of this thesis as the ordinary social practices (in nature) of mainstream ethnic Norwegian culture, among those, the custom shared by many Norwegians, of spending a portion of one's free time in nature. *Figured Worlds* in this master's thesis are special sub-cultures within the mainstream Norwegian culture. The practices in a *Figured World* are framed by its own internal culture. Their meaning and purpose are socially constructed through negotiations among present and past members. Activities thus cohere in a way that they are understood by members who populate that *Figured World*. Because *Norwegianess* is a *Figured World*, adults 'or children's actions, behaviors, attitudes and even dress codes acquire special meanings when interpreted according to that rules sustain it. These rules are often dictated by tradition, habit or practicality; for the most part these rules are unwritten, shared understandings among members about what to wear, how to behave or how to perform certain actions. Newcomers or non-members sometimes have difficulty adjusting to the codes of behavior or even learning what the rules are, especially if they do not have a fluent command of the Norwegian language.

Schools are not culturally neutral; therefore their practices are connected to the *Figured worlds* to which they belong. Non-ethnic Norwegian parents who are not fluent in Norwegian do not belong to the *Figured World Norwegianess* whose main requirement for "admission" is the fluent command of the Norwegian language. However, fluency in the Norwegian language is not the only criteria. There are others which will be analyzed as the discussion proceeds.

8.2.3 Points of Agreement between Ethnic and Non-Ethnic-Norwegian Parents

There was an overall agreement between the two groups of parents regarding the importance of nature in their children's school experience and in their children's lives. Even though all

non-ethnic Norwegian parents acknowledged their own lack of past experience and even knowledge of nature, they demonstrated an acute sense of observation about the effects of nature on their children in different areas.

Motivation, Memory

Both groups reported the fact that their children were always motivated to participate in school-practices-in-nature: the youngsters did not need any encouragement nor did they complain before or after the excursions; on the contrary, most of the parents reported that their children always had positive comments after the trips. There was also unanimous agreement that practice helps memory: according to the parents it was much easier for them to remember something after they had “experienced” it: that meant something they had heard, seen, smelled, touched or tasted. The parents used themselves as a basis for their opinions and, despite the fact that non-ethnic Norwegian parents had very little experience in nature, the opinion shared by both groups of parents was that the use of the senses helps memory and learning.

Both groups of parents reported that their children had learned much about nature and the environment from participating in school-practices-in-nature. All parents named several areas that they considered were proof of learning: children named things as they walked along the forest, children learned how to fish, children learned how to ski, children learned to be patient when they were fishing, children developed their gross motor skills; but, most of all, parents reported that their children had fun (because of the comments the youngsters had made and the stories that they told the parents after the excursions) and they did not “know” that they were learning. Both groups of parents acknowledged the fact that children have different abilities and being outdoors gives opportunities for different children “to shine”, in the words of one of the parents (Tone).

I interpret school-practices-in-nature to be inserted in the *Figured World Norwegianess*. From this point on, the term *Norwegianess* will also connote *the Figured World Norwegianess*. As explained earlier in this Chapter, all figured worlds have socio-cultural practices that sustain them. When children participate in school-practices-in-nature they “enter” *Norwegianess*. However, *entering* a figured world does *not* mean *becoming* a member of it. Thus one of the ways of becoming a member of a figured world is to learn its practices; social practices are learned through participation in them. Consequently, when children are outdoors, they not

only learn the academic subjects, they also learn the practices that afford them entrance into *Norwegianess*.

As seen in Chapter 3, this master's thesis has another theoretical framework, Social Practice Theory, which explains the learning that all parents talked about. According to Social Practice Theory, learning is situated and interwoven in social practice. As explained in Chapter 3, the groups of students that participate together in school-practices-in-nature constitute a community of practice. Since communities of practice work towards a goal, in this case I interpret the goal to be *Norwegianess*. Thus, the groups of students and teachers that participate in school-practices- in-nature constitute a Community of Practice in *Norwegianess*. That means that a community of practice does not necessarily need to learn a trade; what they learn are specific social practices belonging to the figured worlds they are a part of: trades are reified forms of social practice. It is also important to clarify that the fact that children in the figured world *Norwegianess* work towards achieving competence in *Norwegianess*. In other words they are not "assimilating" in a new culture and giving up their own in case they come from a non-ethnic Norwegian background, but they are acquiring an *additional* competence in the social-practices that are connected to nature in *Norwegianess*. Clearly, children's original cultures continue to be integral parts of their identities.

8.2.4 Connecting the Answers of Non-Ethnic Norwegian Parents and Teachers

This discussion will show that much can be learned by applying the two theoretical frameworks that inform this Master's Thesis to the concomitant discussion of Teachers' and non-ethnic Norwegian parents' opinions about the use of nature in school practice. As it was shown in Chapter 5, school-practices-in-nature received positive evaluations from all the parents who reported the benefits they had observed for their children. Teachers were also unanimously positive about the effects school-practices-in-nature have on their students, not only on academic skills and learning, but also in terms of social and personal skills such as cooperation, solidarity, motivation, among others, as exemplified in Chapters 5 and 7. In terms of the theoretical frameworks, I interpret the positive consequences partly as a result of

children having the chance to participate in nature practices which are inherent to *the figured world Norwegianess*. Once they entered *Norwegianess*, the students engaged in *legitimate peripheral participation* (Chapter 3) towards learning to construct *their own Norwegianess through the practices that are a part of that Figured World*. The students, under the guidance of legitimized veteran practitioners (teachers), engaged in processes of evolving participation from their first nature excursion wherein each child started at her own level. As time went by and the students took part in other excursions, they became increasingly familiar with the sights, the sounds, the smells, the textures and flavors of Norwegian nature, (e.g.: the child who tasted a blueberry for the first time (Chapter 7); the boy who played football but needed to practice his gross motor skills so that he would not fall (Chapter 7)). Some of these experiences possibly became a part of each community's (of school practices-in-nature) repertoire of stories and actions (e.g. "funny things, new things, dangerous things"), as described in Chapter 3. We can at this point recall another example of evolving peripheral participation from Chapter 7: the first time the students in the "Welcoming Class" (Mottaksklasse) put on skis, the children wore their skis everywhere, even in the elevator. Moreover, in the beginning, many children would put on their skis backwards until later they learned to recognize the front and the back of their skis. Those new experiences: *putting on skis, recognizing the front from the back of one's skis, where to wear them, skiing, hiking in the forest, tasting unknown fruits*, and countless other behaviors, are all part of the repertoire of *dos and don'ts* (stories, actions, rituals, behaviors) of the various *communities-of school-practices-in-nature* as students and teachers move about in the *Figured World Norwegianess*. Some of the actions or rituals can be learned quite quickly, like the taste of a blueberry or *not* entering the elevator wearing skis; others will take more time and practice until they perhaps become incorporated into the students' own repertoire of behaviors. I chose to use "perhaps" because the learning and membership in the *Figured World Norwegianess* will depend on how long the student is a participant member of the *community of school-practices-in-nature*. The boy described by Vigdis (Chapter 7) who left Norway and migrated to different countries where he spoke other languages and attended various schools, probably did not participate in the practices long enough to incorporate school-practices-in-nature into his repertoire of learned skills. Therefore he probably never had a chance to build *his own Norwegianess*. Furthermore, there is another element that can contribute to the learning described by parents and teachers besides membership in a community of practice in the Figured World Norwegianess. Back in section 2.2, Bruner's ideas about learners' minds and associated

pedagogical practices were presented. One of those ideas of mind was labeled by Bruner, “Children as Thinkers” and the associated pedagogical approach is dialogical, which means that a higher level of understanding is achieved through cooperation and discussion among students and teachers. In my interpretation, when children and teachers are members of a community-of-school-practices-in-nature, all children are viewed as thinkers and the learning is based on a more pervasive dialogical approach than the one in the classroom.

8.2.5 Discussion about the Statements of Non-Ethnic Norwegian Parents and Teachers about Students Who Do Not Participate

In addition to the above, it is also important to remember that non-ethnic Norwegian parents narrated more than their own children’s stories of successful participation in school-practices in nature; they also spoke about other parents they knew who were not able to read the information sent to them by the school (Chapter 5). Considering teachers’ statements about students who are regularly absent from school-practices-in-nature or who habitually wear inappropriate clothing (Chapter 7), it is reasonable to think that their parents do not understand Norwegian. Despite the fact that it is not possible to know with certainty whether *precisely* the children in those families participate or not in nature excursions, it is still very important to discuss the possible consequences of their being absent or wearing inappropriate clothes. It is clear that when students do not participate in school-practices-in-nature, besides missing out on the learning of academic concepts that takes place during those excursions, they also miss out on all the social interactions *before*, during and *after* the practice. I include *before* because there is always considerable excitement and preparation colored by many explanations, questions, answers and verbal exchanges among the participants prior to and after outdoor excursions. Moreover, since teachers also use school-practices-in-nature as themes for discussions, writing and even art (Chapter 7), the absent students will also miss out on those activities. Regarding the students who participate in the excursions but wear inappropriate gear, the quality of their participation may be impacted by their level of discomfort. Furthermore, considering the discussion in the previous section about *Communities-of-School-Practices-in-Nature in the Figured World Norwegianess*, it is a fact that the absent students will not be a part of the communities-of school-practice-in-nature nor

will they enter the *Figured World Norwegianess*. Their absence also means that they will be incognizant of that facet of Norwegian identity, *Norwegianess*, which includes contact with nature as a social practice. Notwithstanding the above discussion, perhaps the strongest motive for concern will be that those children will miss out on their opportunity to construct their *own* Norwegianess (section 8.3).

8.2.6 Teachers and School-Practices-in-Nature

I start this section with a review of the first main research question which was:

What are the points of view of parents and teachers about the use of school-practices-in-nature?

The second part of the main research question above asked for teachers' opinions and reflections about school-practices-in-nature in general; in other words, do activities in nature have any merit for children who attend school in Norway?

The second, main research question, asked:

In the opinion of teachers, what are the benefits, if any, of school-practices-in-nature to children's learning?

The second main research question is more detailed: it asks if there are benefits, what they are. Those benefits were listed in Chapter 7 and, considering the research findings of this master's thesis, the teachers were unanimous in supporting school-practices-in-nature for all the students. The benefits were listed in detail in Chapter 7 and they were present in all academic subjects such as Mathematics, Science, Norwegian, etc. The three most experienced teachers emphasized that it was possible to teach any academic subject as part of school-practices-in-nature. Some of the teachers wished they could have school-practices-in-nature more often. However, according to the findings of this thesis, those benefits were not only limited to the academic disciplines. There were gains in social skills (inter-personal skills), and also in self-knowledge and personal skills (fine and gross motor skills, for example) for both students and teachers. The teachers themselves reported that they were able to see other aspects of children's abilities and personalities when the class participated in school-

practices-in-nature. I interpret the possibility of getting to know one's students better, as an increase in the opportunities for dialogical exchanges among teachers and students. In terms of the theoretical frameworks, Social Practice Theory and Figured Worlds, when children and teachers hike in the forests, sit around a campfire, taste blueberries, pick mushrooms or ski in the snow they are a part of the *Figured World Norwegianess* similarly to the way Norwegians have been for hundreds of years. Bruner explained that people's manner of doing things reflect implied ways of partaking in a culture, that often represent more than they know in an explicit form. And these forms of membership provide sources of cultural support without which a culture would succumb (Bruner, 1996, p. 153). I see a relationship between Bruner's words above and school-practices -in-nature. The ways we do things have a complex and innate connection to the cultures we belong to which Bruner considered difficult to articulate. As an example of that difficulty, he narrated a short episode that happened in the hills above an Alpine village where one of his friends had spent summers since childhood. Bruner observed that his friend always greeted other hikers while she hiked on the hills. Bruner tried to follow suit and started greeting everyone, even after they had come down to the village. At which point he was admonished by his friend who explained that *in that area* they only greeted strangers while in the mountains. When inquired by Bruner as to why that was so, his friend who, normally was rather articulate, had a difficult time explaining. This short anecdote by Bruner goes to say that certain cultural practices can only be learned and understood in that culture. When an individual becomes so familiar with enough cultural practices that they become second-nature to that individual, then (s) he becomes an "active member" of that culture. But two observations must be made: that membership does not mean that people will have to forget any other culture they might belong to; the other point is that one must actively *perform the activities* since it is actions that count. In other words, *Norwegianess is learned through active participation* and does not imply any loss of one's original culture. That means that one does not become a member of *Norwegianess* by *reading* about it; one has to be an *actor* in it.

8.3 A Short Summary of the Main Themes

Because there are four Research Questions and many research findings that are a result of this master's thesis, I have decided to group them according to main themes. The themes represent renewed opportunities for reflection on the findings.

1) Challenges between Home and School Communication

A successful school experience for children depends on cooperation between families and schools. Both must join efforts in order to foster positive learning for *all* children, without exceptions. However, according to the findings in Chapters 5 and 7 and, as shown in sections 8.2.4 and 8.2.5 in this master's thesis, there are gaps in the communication between schools and families. As a result of those gaps, there are some children and families that have been considered "exceptions". Considering the rising number of non-ethnic Norwegian families in Norway, particularly in Oslo, some parents' lack of Norwegian language skills contributes to this communication gap and represents a challenge that schools and teachers currently face. One of the most serious consequences of this communication fissure between schools and families is the fact that, in democratic Norway, not all children are getting the same quality of experience in school-practices-in-nature (Chapter 5, 7, 8). Consequently, they are not partaking in all the learning possibilities at school. Since no individual child should be hindered from her right to learn, it is important for schools to address the problem of effectively communicating with *all* families. Because the weekly schedule was reported as the most important source of information about school by teachers and parents (Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8), it is crucial that all families understand its content. Among the findings in this master's thesis there were many suggestions for improved communication and participation voiced by teachers and families. In the remainder of this section I have compiled their suggestions for improved communication. The first suggestion of parents and teachers is that information about school activities and/or weekly schedules should be made available in several languages and sent to parents in their language of preference. Supplementary to that, I believe that information about the importance of field trips and what type of clothing should be worn should be sent to families in their preferred language, every time there is an excursion. It is my view that knowledge about the purpose and importance of school-practices-in-nature would increase attendance to those events and help some families with the right choice of clothing, shoes and equipment. An additional benefit may be that parents will

perceive this initiative as an acknowledgment that their language and child's participation are valued. This may help parents feel more included in what goes on at school. (Sibel, the teacher of Turkish background, told me during her interview that, as a child, she had felt very valued when, sometimes on assembly days, the school she attended would play a Turkish song she used to know. She reported that, just *one* song in her native language, had made a very positive impact on her as a child; it had made her feel included in the school community). Another fact that may hinder the quality of children's participation mentioned by teachers is that many students wear inappropriate clothing/ shoes or do not have the right gear. In that regard a "shared closet" of clothes, shoes and equipment that could be borrowed by everyone may help many children.

II) Challenges between the Intention and the Reality of the Curriculum

This theme is also related to the issue of communication, but this section deals with teachers' interpretations of the recommendations of the curriculum. According to the research findings in this thesis, (Chapter7), different teachers may interpret the instructions of the curriculum in completely different ways. According to teachers' reports (Chapter7), the present curriculum, KL06, is not specific about when teaching should happen outside or when it could take place in the classroom. Therefore the decision to stay inside or to go outdoors is left to each individual teacher. At first glance this may appear reasonable. However, reflecting back on Vigdis's statement (Chapter 7) that "teachers' personalities are reflected in their teaching", it is not difficult to conclude that a teacher who is used to being in nature will perhaps use opportunities to go outdoors, whereas a teacher who is not accustomed to being in nature may opt to have teaching in the classroom. The decision of where to teach a topic, indoor or outdoor, based entirely on the personal preferences of a teacher would be reasonable if school-practices-in-nature had no special benefits by themselves. However, this master's thesis has shown (Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8) the considerable benefits students receive from participation in school-practices-in-nature. In addition, in Chapter 2, I have also shown that some recommendations of the curriculum contain specific instructions for teaching to take place outside. Thus, because the choice not to be outdoors has considerable consequences for learning, it should be carefully discussed by groups of teachers or by the school as a whole. In addition, it was also a finding in this study that some teachers reported that they were not qualified to teach in nature. This fact should also be taken into consideration when teachers are assigned to teach certain subjects or topics. Another finding is that some of the teachers

were unsure where there were references to nature in the curriculum. One of the teachers associated being outdoors only with Science teaching. Another one did not appear so sure how to hold the students' attention while outside. These facts suggest that more time should be devoted each year to a detailed study and discussion of the curriculum and its recommendations for all the subjects in order for teachers to be cognizant of all its strengths and limitations.

III) Challenges Between the Importance of Being in Nature versus Being in the Classroom

This theme has partly been discussed in the previous section. The additional factor here is that the present curriculum does not discuss testing despite the fact that it became clear, from interviewing the teachers, that substantial teaching time is devoted to that purpose. Testing has also been used by the media to rate schools, and within schools, the results might have been used to compare subjects and even countries. Teachers expressed concern about testing but, aside from Thor, they were not so descriptive in their answers. While interviewed, teachers expressed some concern about preparation for testing and test results (normally referred to by teachers as simply "testing") or, as Sesilje described it, "(testing) is always in the back of our heads". My evaluation of "the testing issue" and of the way the results are used is that both of them ought to be further discussed and evaluated by the educational community, first. Results should only be submitted to the authorities after being thoroughly researched by the educational community. Teachers made it clear that a substantial number of teaching hours are devoted to "preparing" the students for tests. Those informants also reported that they had to be inside the classroom to prepare the students. My interpretation is that "preparing the students" means that children are being drilled on the skills they are going to be tested on. Because of the time necessary to drill students in test taking skills, teachers may decide that they cannot afford the time for school-practices-in-nature. However, according to the findings of this thesis, while students are participating in school-.practices-in-nature, they are acquiring all the benefits described in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 and furthermore, those practices have a fundamental role in the development of a student's own Norwegianess as will be described in the Categorizing Norwegianess section later in this thesis.

In other words, using Bruner's terminology from Chapter 2, students are subject to a modality of teaching labeled "didactic exposure" that was also explained in Chapter 2. In this modality of teaching, there is no dialogical exchange. Teachers are the ones holding the knowledge

they transmit to students. Learners' ideas are not considered as important as their performances on evaluative assignments.

Summarizing all of the above, while children are being “drilled” on testing skills, there is no time for school-practices-in-nature, there is no time for dialogical exchange between students and teachers and, most importantly, no time devoted to children's Norwegianess. (See section, “Categorizing Norwegianess”).

IV) *Nature and the Importance of Doing*

All the informants without exception acknowledged the importance of school-practices-in-nature. Much has already been discussed about the benefits of being in nature regardless of background: among the most emphasized gains are: being in nature motivates students' curiosity: children seem to remember better after they learn a topic in vivo. Importantly, teachers reported that they can see the “whole” child, i.e. they were able to observe other aspects of children's personalities that they did notice in the classroom, which may indicate that children are more demonstrative when they participate in school-practices-in-nature. Furthermore, I emphasize that the acknowledgement of the importance of nature did not depend on an informant's prior experiences in the “great outdoors” since many of the informers (non-ethnic Norwegian parents) hardly had any past experience in nature. Similarly to the informants, Bruner emphasized the importance of practice when he stated (Bruner, 1996, p. 152):

Skill is a way of dealing with things, not a derivation from theory. Doubtless, skill can be improved with the help of theory, as when we learn about the inside and outside edges of our skis, but our skiing doesn't improve until we get that knowledge back into the skill of skiing. Knowledge helps only when it descends into habits.

Bruner explains skills through action: skill is a way of doing something. According to him, it is action that gives meaning to knowledge, not the other way around. Theoretical knowledge can help improve a skill, but it is knowledge put into action that will improve the skill of performing an act. *Norwegianess* can only be learned through the experience of being in nature. The same happens with so many other kinds of knowledge described throughout this thesis: it was only through action that the students in the “Welcoming class” (Mottaksklasse) learned to ski; it was only after he tasted a blueberry that the little boy *understood* what a blueberry was. This is the unique aspect of nature: when students are in nature, their possibilities for action and understanding are multiplied. Moreover, given the discussions in

the previous sections about *Norwegianess* being a *Figured World* where school-practices-in-nature take place, and the discussion in the following section, *Categorizing Norwegianess*, in the special case of Norway where nature is an important element in the Norwegian identity, culturally competent individuals should have cognizance of nature as a social practice. Finally, nature is a vital ingredient in Sustainable Education which will be discussed in section 8.5.

8.4 Categorizing Norwegianess

In this section I wish to further elaborate on the idea of Norwegianess which has been one of the threads woven throughout this thesis. Earlier in this Chapter I have discussed how children's participation in school-practices-in-nature can afford them entrance into the figured world Norwegianess. Besides the idea developed in this thesis that Norwegianess is a figured world wherein school-practices-in-nature take place, Norwegianess has also been an important concept in Norwegian academic and media debate for the last several years (Lynnebakke, Fangen, 2011; Eriksen, 1993, 1996, 2005, 2013). The necessity of structuring such an important concept seems essential in order to foster a deeper understanding of its scope so that parameters for discussion can be formulated. The article by Lynnebakke and Fangen (2011) is of special interest to this section's theme, "Categorizing Norwegianess", because it introduced three possible criteria for structuring the concept. The empirical basis for the article was interviews with young adult immigrants and young adult descendants of immigrants who were all visible minorities except for one. Lynnebakke and Fangen reported that the starting point for the article was Brubaker's concept of "groupness" whose theoretical elements were used and applied to the concept of Norwegianess. The two aforementioned researchers empirically determined that the interviewees in their study experienced various degrees of "groupness" or, according to the article, degrees of Norwegianess. The empirical results pointed to three main parameters that were present in the interviewees' conceptualizations of Norwegianess: descent, social practices and citizenship. Among the three, citizenship was the least important as a criterium for Norwegianess. On the other hand, much importance was given by those interviewed to descent and cultural practices as parameters for Norwegianess. Regarding descent, despite its importance, many of the informants in Lynnebakke and Fangen's study reported a *higher degree of Norwegianess* when they were actors in contexts where diversity existed. In that regard, according to the

article, informants' neighborhoods were considered important factors influencing their reported degree of Norwegianess. According to my interpretation of the article, the more culturally diverse an informant's social circles were, the less of an outsider (s) he felt. More importantly, considering the amount of time young people spend in schools, I believe that being a student in a culturally diverse school would also be influential as to the degree of Norwegianess reported by students; provided the school created conditions and practices where diversity was valued and understood. In that regard, school-practices-in-nature stand as good examples. Besides the above, another criterium considered important in the informants' reported degree of Norwegianess in that study was Norwegian cultural practices. Some interviewees reported that they experienced "less" Norwegianess because they did not participate in Norwegian cultural practices; among those, Norwegian-practices-in-nature were mentioned repeatedly by several informants. This last point brings us back to my present research study of school-practices-in-nature. This master's thesis has shown that when all children, regardless of ethnicity, participate in school-practices-in-nature they become members of a community of practice where they have the opportunity to learn, not only many of the academic skills that are listed in the curriculum, but also important social skills and Norwegian cultural codes that are important parameters of Norwegianess as confirmed by the article above.

Constructing One's own Norwegianess

Undoubtedly many have a "strong interest in Norwegian national identity" (Eriksen: 1993), this intangible quality, that many have labeled Norwegianess. As the section above has shown, Norwegianess is a complex concept that may evoke different associations: descent, citizenship, social practice. Norwegianess can evoke affinities towards the land and its rituals, it can bring back memories of wind, snow or carefree summers; it can evoke a whole array of social, cultural and even geographical elements, all of which can be called Norwegianess. Clearly, it is crucial that we keep reflecting, critiquing, and reformulating Norwegianess. This thesis studied one of the aspects of Norwegianess related to school-practices-in-nature. More than anything, it is vital to consider that Norwegianess is subject to continuous transformation along and within Norwegian culture. In other words, Norwegian culture transforms Norwegianess and Norwegianess also helps transform Norwegian culture. Perhaps it is time we reflect that Norwegianess can be, not limited and frozen, but a ubiquitous, democratically available seed, that will be accessible to each of us to cultivate and grow with the nutrients of

knowledge, practice, and social justice. In that case, in the near future when we observe youngsters of all ethnicities who attend Norwegian schools, it will be a fact that all of them, and not just some, will have the possibility of building their own Norwegianess.

8.5 Education for Sustainable Development

In the world where the children of today will live as adults, every environmental choice will probably have more immediate consequences than they do today. One of the reasons for the heavier weight of future choices is that human beings have been overusing nature's resources for too long. In order to deal with fewer resources and a higher world population, the adults of the future will have to work together and be highly educated in the ways of nature. I join a growing number of researchers, educators, students, policy makers and people from all walks of life and all parts of the globe, young and old, who stress that the time to start educating young people for the future is now.

In the words of Bruner:

If the hypothesis... introduced is true—that any subject can be taught to any child in some honest form—then it should follow that a curriculum ought to be built around the great issues, principles and values that a society deems worthy of the continual concern of its members (Bruner, 1977)

The ability to predict the global consequences of our ordinary behaviors is a difficult challenge, especially when we consider all the variables that must be taken into account such as globalized economies, the media, politics, many of which promote unsustainable behaviors, inadvertently or not. In that regard, schools play a crucial role in helping the young develop an understanding of the interconnectedness of all earth's systems which will give them the basis to make educated choices. Clearly, it is people's decision and responsibility as to what kinds of behaviors they will adopt, but education has a fundamental role in helping young people develop informed values that will enable them to make reflected personal choices" (Beames, Higgins & Nicol, 2011).

Sustainable development is a concept that is related to the ethical way humans should behave on the planet. Education for Sustainable Development or Education for Sustainability is an approach to teaching wherein students and teachers study and investigate the interdependence of the various systems on the planet and analyze how politics, economics, societies,

communities and the environment are interwoven with a person's life-experiences. (Patricia Collins, Education for Sustainability). Education for sustainable development is a "process of learning how to make decisions that consider the long-term future of the economy, ecology and equity of all communities" (Kristin Norddahl, Iceland, Paris, UNESCO, 2008).

The question therefore is: why are school-practices-in-nature and *Norwegianess* important in education for sustainable development? The immediate answer is that school-practices-in-nature and *Norwegianess* foster direct physical/sensory, cognitive, and affective ways of knowing the environment (Chapter 5, 6, 7, 8). Nevertheless, it is a fact that sustainability is an intricate matter whose complexity lies in the need to take into consideration all the different elements of the earth's systems and to understand the multiple ways in which they are connected to and interact with each other. Although school-practices-in-nature and *Norwegianess* cannot give young students all the necessary knowledge to deal with such complexity, nor are youngsters ready to tackle such problems, they can have a crucial role in providing students with the fundamentals to a deeper understanding of the relationships and interrelatedness of all systems. Developing one's own Norwegianess through school-practices-in-nature is to acquire cultural competence in social practices involving close contact with nature. That means developing a deep understanding of the delicacy and interconnectedness of ecosystems. *Norwegianess* stands also for a figured world of nature practices, involving nature appreciation, knowledge and respect for all earth's living forms. By means of school-practices-in-nature and Norwegianess children learn that each action must be carefully reflected upon as to its purpose, need and consequences. This kind of reflection beginning with small things (e.g. *Do I really need to pick that mushroom without knowing if it is eatable or not? Would I eat it if I could?*) is what school-practices-in-nature and Norwegianess teach children. Understanding of the "world-wide-web" of systems and their intricate connections has now become the *basic skill* that all young people will need on their way to make responsible choices that are crucial in the urgent need to build a more sustainable future for all.

8.6 Conclusion

The idea that concepts must be defined with precision and definite boundaries is not perhaps what best characterizes qualitative research. In this thesis and, inspired by Holland et al., Lave and Wenger (1991), among other researchers, I have tried, in reflective accordance with the theoretical frameworks that have guided my gaze, to think of concepts in interconnected, relational terms. Hence, the concepts of Norwegianess and school-practices-in-nature acquired their meaning, not within framed boundaries, but through relational interactions with other persons and the environment. I have listened to parents' and teachers' opinions about the importance of school-practices-in-nature to children's learning and have dared to use the term, because I interpret learning as a phenomenon that causes visible changes in attitudes and behaviors that those near the children (teachers and parents) can clearly observe. The young students were seen as "practitioners", and teachers as "old timers" engaged in communities-of-school-practices-in-nature, wherein everyone's participation counts immensely, because it is through their individual actions and interactions with each other that their own Norwegianess is developed. Those whose participation is impacted or who do not participate, have their possibilities of building Norwegianess and, therefore their sense of belongingness to a community, atrophied. This issue points to the need for clearer communication modalities between schools and families.

Undoubtedly, there is much yet to be researched on the area of school-practices-in-nature and their effects on learning in schools. Furthermore, the idea that schools are culturally neutral is not coherent with all the research on learning and schools. Taking that into consideration and reflecting upon the inevitability of migration and immigration, (Chapter 8) it is imperative that schools become more cognizant of their own situatedness. Thus schools, educators and authorities responsible for curriculum development, must create continuous discussion panels and actively participate in researching their own cultural bias and ways to counteract them in order for a truly democratic society, one where every individual has equal access to valued social-practices, to continue to exist in the future. Most importantly, classroom must open doors to incorporate other ways of knowing, innovative types of pedagogies and approaches to teaching and learning. The connections among learning, motivation, doing, participating and actively belonging to communities (schools included) must be further investigated in formal learning (school) and informal learning contexts.

This thesis represents a contribution towards an understanding of the positive impact of venturing outside the classroom with a learning objective.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Informasjonsbrev til Informanter

Informasjonsbrev til Informanter

Dette er et informasjonsskriv som dere har krav på som informanter. Det er dere som utgjør selve grunnlaget for at jeg skal kunne gjennomføre denne studien. Aller først vil jeg derfor takke dere for at dere tar dere tid til å stille opp på dette intervjuet. Min masterstudie har denne problemstillingen:

”How do families of ethnic Norwegian and non-ethnic Norwegian background experience the emphasis on nature in child rearing practices, in educational curriculum and school practices in Norway?” (på engelsk)

Hvordan familier av etnisk norsk og ikke- etnisk norsk bakgrunn opplever vekt på natur i barneoppdragelsen, i pedagogiske læreplan og skolens praksis i Norge? (på norsk).

Gjennom intervjuer med kontaktlærere på grunnskole, etniske norske foreldre, ikke etniske norske foreldre og læreplan eksperter ønsker jeg å belyse denne problemstillingen ut fra deres personlige erfaringer. Tema for intervjuet vil først og fremst være ”natur” som tema i norsk skole og i den norskekulturen. Intervjuet er kun ment som en uformell samtale med deg/ dere der jeg ønsker å ta del i de erfaringer dere har om ”natur” som tema i den norske kulturen.

Selve intervjuet gjennomføres én og én, det vil vare cirka tretti minutter og vil bli tatt opp med en lydopptaker. Dette for at jeg skal kunne gjengi hva dere sier så presist som mulig i studien. Under hele prosessen vil både dere og skolen deres bli anonymisert. Intervjuet vil bli oppbevart nedlåst og utilgjengelig for andre. Lydopptaket vil bli makulert innen 31.12.2013.

Intervjuet vil bli analysert, der jeg sorterer ut hva som er vesentlig og mindre vesentlig for studien. Ut fra dette blir datagrunnlaget for studien laget. Det er derfor viktig at dere samtykker i at deres erfaringer, opplevelser og ytringer kan bli sitert i studien.

Som informanter har dere på hvilke som helst tidspunkt mulighet til å trekke dere som informanter. For min egen del er det likevel fint om dere gir signal om dette så tidlig som mulig i prosessen.

Jeg ser frem til samtalene med dere og jeg er sikker på at både jeg og dere sitter igjen med positive erfaringer etter intervjuet. Jeg ser for meg at intervjuene vil bli gjennomført i april/ mai 2012. Jeg tar kontakt med dere for å avtale nærmere tidspunkt.

Med vennlig hilsen,

Eliane R. Koelsch

Appendix 2: Brev til Foreldre

Brev til Foreldre

Hei!

Jeg heter Eliane R. Koelsch og jobbet som Spesial Pedagog på «Solbakken Skole» i en periode fra 2008 til 2010. Nå tar jeg masterstudie på Universitet i Oslo. I mitt prosjekt ønsker jeg å intervju minst 3 norske foreldre og 3 ikke etnisk norske foreldre og lære deres mening om natur og friluftsliv i Osloskolen. Intervjuet er bare en uformell samtale på skole med dere, der jeg ønsker å ta del i de erfaringer dere har om "natur" på skolen.

Samtalen varer cirka 30 minutter, gjennomføres én og én og blir tatt opp med en lydopptaker. Opptaket gjøres for at jeg skal kunne huske hva dere sier så presist som mulig. Under prosessen vil dere og deres skole bli anonymisert. Det betyr at ingen, unntatt dere og jeg, vil vite hva dere har sagt i samtalen. Prosjektet har fått godkjenning av rektor Guri Normann.

Jeg håper at jeg får anledning til å prate med dere! Hvis dere ønsker å delta, vær så snill og krysse i boksen nederst.

Med vennlig hilsen,

Eliane R. Koelsch

☐ Jeg ønsker å delta i samtalen.

Navn: _____

Mobile: _____

Appendix 3: Interview Guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Parents and Teachers: Background Questions

3 levels of questioning: Curriculum, School Practices and Child Rearing

Nature, for the purpose of these interviews, is defined as natural Norwegian nature: mountains, rivers, beaches, forests, large open spaces, etc. City parks such as Frogner Park, Sofienberg Park, and St. Hanshaugen are considered outdoor spaces. Parents will be informed on that difference before the interview.

Interview Questions: Non-ethnic Norwegian Parents

Background Data

- Can you say a little about yourself and your background?
- What country do you come from?
- How long have you been in Norway?
- How many children do you have?
- How old are they?

(Here I explain that we are focusing on the child who is 7 years old and is in second grade). I also explain that she can feel free to compare to the other grade levels in case she has more than one child.

- (Have you always lived in Oslo?)
- How long have you lived in Oslo?
- Do you think it is important for children to be outside?
- Are there any new possibilities for being outside in Oslo compared to where you come from?

Opinions about School Knowledge and Being in Nature

- How do you get information about what is happening in school?
- What kinds of knowledge are important for children to learn in school? Can you explain?
- Do you think it is possible to learn some of those topics outside in nature?
- Here in Norway children are outside more than in other countries, regardless of the weather, what is your opinion about that?

- Does being outside in all kinds of weather agree with what schools should teach in your opinion? Can you explain?
- Do you think it is important to be outside? (in nature) What time of year? Any special time during the day? Can you explain?
- Do you think children learn when they are in nature? What kinds of things do they learn in your opinion?
- Does your child always participate in school trips? What about ski days or day tours? Can you explain why? What do you think your child learns in such trips?
- Do you think there is a difference between learning inside and outside the classroom? Can you explain?
- What do you think about the role of nature in school?
- What are your thoughts about the winters in Norway?
- What is your experience about the clothes that must be worn in the cold seasons?
- What are your thoughts and experience about the dark periods in Norway?
- Are there any challenges about living in Norway regarding the weather or the dark periods?
- What would you say is typically Norwegian regarding nature?

Issues of Child Rearing and Being in Nature

- Do you think it is important for children to be in nature or is it enough to be outside?
- What type of nature experience does your family have outside school? Can you tell us a little more?
- What differences do you see between the contact Norwegian families have with nature and the type of experiences your family (families in your culture have) has (have)?
- (Do you think that is enough? Why this experience, etc.)
- Have you changed the way you raise your children since you moved to Norway? How? Why?
- What are your feelings about that?
- How do you think that growing up in Norway has influenced your child?
- How do you think moving to Norway has influenced your family?

- Had you and your family not moved how would his, her childhood have been with regards to having contacts with nature?

MEDIA /HISTORY

- Does your child like to watch nature programs on TV?
- What is your opinion about the relationship between Norwegians and nature?

Interview Questions: Norwegian Parents

Background Data

- Can you say a little about yourself and your background?
- How many children do you have?
- How old are they?

(Here I explain that we are focusing on the child who is 7 years old and is in second grade). I also explain that she can feel free to compare to the other grade levels in case she has more than one child.

- (Have you always lived in Oslo?)
- How long have you lived in Oslo?
- Do you think it is important for children to be outside?
- Are there any new possibilities for being outside in Oslo compared to where you come from? / Are there unique opportunities for being outside in Oslo compared to other places?

Opinions about School Knowledge and Being in Nature

- How do you get information about what is happening in school?
- What kinds of knowledge are important for children to learn in school? Can you explain?
- Do you think it is possible to learn some of those topics outside in nature?
- Here in Norway children are outside more than in other countries, regardless of the weather, what is your opinion about that?
- Does being outside in all kinds of weather agree with what schools should teach in your opinion? Can you explain?
- Do you think it is important to be outside? In nature) what time of year? Any special time during the day? Can you explain?
- Do you think children learn when they are in nature? What kinds of things do they learn in your opinion?

- Does your child always participate in school trips? What about ski days or day tours? Can you explain why? What do you think they learn on those trips?
- Do you think there is a difference between learning inside and outside the classroom? Can you explain?
- What do you think about the role of nature in school?
- What would you say is typically Norwegian regarding nature?

Issues of Child Rearing and Being in Nature

- Do you think it is important for children to be in nature or is it enough to be outside?
- What type of nature experience does your family have outside school? Can you tell us a little more?
- (Do you think that is enough? Why this experience, etc.)
- Have you changed the way you raise your children since you moved to Oslo? How? Why? (For those who are not from here) / Do you think your children have any special nature experiences because they live in Oslo? Can you explain?
- What are your feelings about that?

MEDIA /HISTORY

- Does your child like to watch nature programs on TV?
- What is your opinion about the relationship between Norwegians and nature?

Interview Questions: Teachers

Background Data

- Can you say a little about yourself and your background?
- (Have you always lived in Oslo?)
- How long have you lived in Oslo?
- Can you say something about what kind of school you teach at?(location, student population, ethnic background of student population)
- How long have you been teaching there?
- How many students do you have?
- What grade level do you teach?
- How old are they?
- How many non-ethnic Norwegian students do you have?
- Do you think it is important for children to be outside?
- Are there any new possibilities for being outside in Oslo compared to where you come from? / Are there unique opportunities for being outside in Oslo compared to other places?

Opinions about School Knowledge and Being in Nature

- How do the parents of your students get informed about what is happening in school?
- What kinds of knowledge are important for children to learn in school? Can you explain?
- Do you think it is possible to teach subjects such as math outside in nature?
- Here in Norway children are outside more than in other countries, regardless of the weather, what is your opinion about that?
- Can you explain where and in which ways nature appears in the curriculum for elementary school?
- What kinds of knowledge do children acquire when they are in nature in your opinion?

- What are your reflections about what happens as the children go up to higher grade levels in terms of nature experiences?
- On average how many of your students would you say participate in school trips? What about ski days or day tours?
- Can you explain why or why not? How important do you think those trips are for the children? What do you think they learn on those trips?
- What are your thoughts about what the difference is between learning inside and outside in nature? Can you explain?
- What do you think about the role of nature in school, both inside and outside the classroom?
- What are your thoughts about the way nature is treated in the present curriculum?
- What is your experience in the classroom about the clothes that must be worn in the cold seasons? Do all your students have the necessary clothes?
- What are your thoughts and experience about the dark periods in Norway? Do you notice any difference in your students' behavior in regards to nature?
- What would you say is typically Norwegian regarding nature?
- What are your thoughts about the amount of time you and your students spend in nature? Can you explain?
- Do you conduct any teaching when you are outside? Can you explain?
- Are there any special challenges related to teaching out in nature?
- Do you notice any difference in the behavior of your students during outside teaching?
- If you think of identity as “a way of being”, what kinds of identities are schools in Oslo (Norway) helping to form?
- You have both ethnic Norwegian and Non-ethnic Norwegian students—do you see any differences between those two groups in regards to the question above?

Issues of Child Rearing and Being in Nature

- Do you think it is important for children to be in nature or is it enough to be outside?
- What type of nature experience do you personally have outside of school? Can you tell us a little more? (Do you think that is enough? Why this experience, etc.)

MEDIA /HISTORY

- Do you like to watch nature programs on TV?
- What is your opinion about the relationship between Norwegians and nature?

